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THE WHITE SCALPER.

A STORY OF THE TEXAN WAR.

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD,

AUTHOR OF "LOYAL HEART," "PRAIRIE FLOWER," "THE TRAPPER'S DAUGHTER," "THE BANDIT AT BAY,"
"THE BORDER RIFLES," "THE FREEBOOTERS," ETC., ETC.



THE WOUNDED MAN WAS IMMEDIATELY PICKED UP AND CARRIED SOME TWENTY YARDS TO A DRY SPOT.

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CHAPTER I.

A RECONNOISSANCE.

COLONEL MELENDEZ, after leaving the Jaguar at Salto del Frayle, galloped along the Galveston road, toward the town. While galloping, he reflected; and the more he did so, the more impossible did it appear to him that the Jaguar had told the truth. In fact, how could it be supposed that this partisan, brave and rash though he was, would have dared to attack, at the head of a handful of adventurers, a well-equipped corvette, manned by a numerous crew, and commanded by one of the best officers in the Mexican navy? The capture of the fort seemed even more improbable to the colonel.

While reflecting thus, the colonel had gradually slackened his horse's speed; the animal had passed from a gallop into a canter, then a trot, and finally fell into a walk, with drooping head, and snapping at the blades of grass within its reach.

Night had set in; a complete silence brooded over the country, only broken by the hollow moan of the sea as it rolled over the shingle. The colonel was following a small track along the coast, which greatly shortened the distance separating him from Galveston. This path, much used by day, was at this hour of the night completely deserted; the ranchos that stood here and there were closed, and no light gleamed through their narrow windows, for the fishermen, fatigued by the rude toil of the day, had retired to bed at an early hour.

The young officer's horse at length stopped near a scrubby bush, whose leaves it began nibbling. This immobility aroused the colonel from his reverie, and he looked about him to see where he was. About a musket-shot ahead was a rancho, whose closed windows allowed a thin pencil of light to filter through the interstices of the shutters. The colonel struck his repeater and found it was midnight. To go on would be madness; the more so, as it would be impossible for him to find a boat in which to cross to the island. Greatly annoyed at this obstacle, which, supposing the Jaguar's revelations to be true, might entail serious consequences, the young officer resolved on pushing on to the rancho before him, and try to obtain means to cross the bay.

After drawing his cloak tightly round him, to protect him as much as possible from the damp sea-air, the colonel caught up the reins, and giving his horse the spur, trotted sharply toward the rancho. When a few paces from it, he dismounted, fastened his horse to a larch-tree, and, after placing his pistols in his belt, made a long circuit, and stealthily crept up to the window of the rancho.

In the state of fermentation then existing in Texas, the olden confidence had entirely disappeared to make way for distrust. The times were past when the doors of houses remained opened day and night. Hospitality, which was traditional in these parts, had changed into a suspicious reserve, and it would have been an act of imprudence to ride up to a strange house, without first discovering whether it was that of a friend. The colonel, being dressed in a Mexican uniform, was forced to act with great caution.

This rancho was a large, square house, with a roof in the Italian fashion, having in front an azotea-covered portillo. The whitewashed walls were an agreeable contrast to the virgin vines, and other plants which ran over it. This rancho was not inclosed with walls; a thick hedge, broken through at several places, alone defended the approaches. The dependencies of the house were vast, and well kept up. All proved that the owner of this mansion carried on a large trade.

The colonel, as we have said, had softly approached one of the windows. The shutters were closed. In vain did the colonel place his eyes at the slit, for he could see nothing. If he could not see, however, he could hear, and the first words that reached his ear appeared to him very serious, for he redoubled his attention, in order to lose no portion of the conversation. Employing once again our privilege as romancers, we will enter the rancho, and allow the reader to witness the singular scene going on there, the most interesting part of which escaped the colonel.

In a rather small room, dimly lighted by a smoky candle, four men, with gloomy faces and ferocious glances, dressed in the garb of Campesinos, were assembled. Three of them, seated on butacas and equipals, were listening, with their guns between their legs, to the fourth, who, with his arms behind his back, was walking rapidly up and down.

The broad brims of the vicuna hats which the three first wore, and the obscurity prevailing in the room, only allowed their faces to be dimly seen. The fourth, on the contrary, was bareheaded; he was a man of about forty, tall, and well-built; his muscular limbs denoted a far from common strength, and a forest of black and curly hair fell on his wide shoulders. He had a lofty forehead, aquiline nose, and black and piercing eyes; while the lower part of his face disappeared in a long and thick beard. There was in the appearance of this man something bold and haughty, which inspired respect, and almost fear.

At this moment, he seemed to be in a tremendous passion; his eyebrows were contracted, his cheeks livid, and at times, when he yielded to the emotion he tried in vain to restrain, his eye flashed so fiercely, that it forced his three hearers to bow their heads humbly. At the moment when we entered the room, the stranger appeared to be continuing a discussion that had been going on for some time.

"No," he said, in a powerful voice, "things cannot go on thus any longer. You dishonor the holy cause we are defending by revolting acts of cruelty, which injure us in the opinion of the population. It is not by imitating our oppressors that we shall succeed in proving to the masses that we really wish their welfare. However sweet it may be to avenge an insult received, where men put themselves for-

ward as defenders of a principle so sacred as that for which we have been shedding our blood the last ten years, every man must practice self-denial, and forget all his private animosities to absorb them in the great national vengeance. I tell you this frankly, plainly, and with no reserve. I, who was the first that dared to utter the cry of revolt, and inaugurate resistance; I, who, since I have reached man's estate, have sacrificed everything, fortune, friends, and relations, in the sole hope of seeing my country one day free, would retire from a struggle which is daily dishonored by excesses such as the red-skins themselves would disavow."

The three men, who had been tolerably quiet up to this moment, then rose, protesting simultaneously that they were innocent of the crimes imputed to them.

"I do not believe you," he continued, passionately; "I do not believe you, because I can prove the utter truth of the accusation I am now making. You deny it, as I expected. Your part was ready traced, and you might be expected to act so; all other paths were closed to you. Only one of you the youngest, the one who perhaps had the greatest right to employ reprisals, has always remained equal to his mission; and, though our enemies have tried several times to brand him, he has ever remained firm, as the Mexicans themselves allow. This chief you know as well as I do; it is the Jaguar. Only yesterday, at the head of some of our men, he accomplished one of the most glorious and extraordinary exploits."

All pressed round the stranger, and eagerly questioned him.

"What need for me to tell you what has occurred? You will know it within a few hours. Suffice it for you to know for the present, that the consequence of the Jaguar's daring achievement is the immediate surrender of Galveston, which cannot hold out against us any longer."

"Then we triumph!" one of the Campesinos exclaimed.

"Yes; but all is not over yet; if we have succeeded in taking the town of Galveston from the Mexicans, they have fifty left. Hence, instead of giving way to immoderate joy, and imprudent confidence, redouble your efforts and self-denial, if you wish to remain victors to the end."

"But what is to be done to obtain the result we desire as much as you do?" the one who had already spoken asked.

"Follow blindly the counsels I give you, and obey without hesitation or comment the orders I send you. Will you promise me this?"

"Yes," they exclaimed, enthusiastically; you alone, Don Benito, can guide us safely and insure our victory."

There was a moment's silence. The man who had just been addressed as Don Benito went to a corner of the room hidden behind a curtain of green serge. This curtain he drew back, and behind it was an alabaster statue of the Virgin Soledad, with a lamp burning in front of it, and then turned to the others.

"On your knees, and take off your hats," he said. They obeyed.

"Now," he continued, "swear to keep faithfully the promise you have just made me; swear to be merciful to the conquered in battle, and gentle to the prisoners after the victory. At this price I pledge myself to support you; if not, I retire immediately from a cause which is at least dishonored, if not lost."

The three men, after piously crossing themselves, stretched out their right arms toward the statue, saying, in a firm voice:

"We swear it, by the share we hope in Paradise."

"It is well," Don Benito replied, as he drew the curtain across again and made them a sign to rise; "I know you are too thoroughly caballeros to break so solemn an oath."

The colonel, confounded by this singular scene, which he did not at all comprehend, did not know what to do, when he fancied he heard an indistinct sound not far from him. Drawing himself up, he concealed himself behind the hedge, rather alarmed as to the cause of this noise, which was rapidly approaching. Almost immediately he noticed several men coming gently up; they were four in number and carrying a fifth in their arms. They walked straight to the door, at which they tapped in a peculiar way.

"Who's there?" was asked from inside.

One of the new-comers replied, but in so low a tone that it was impossible for the colonel to hear the reply. The door was opened, and the strangers entered; it was then closed again, but not until the opener had cast a scrutinizing glance round him.

"What does this mean?" the colonel muttered. "It means," a rough voice said in his ear, "that you are listening to what does not concern you, Colonel Melendez, and that it may prove dangerous to you."

The colonel, astounded at this unexpected answer, and especially at being so well known, quickly drew a pistol from his belt, cocked it, and turned to his strange speaker.

"On my word," he answered, "there is no worse danger to incur than that of an immediate death, which I should not at all object to, I swear to you."

The stranger began laughing and emerged from the thicket in which he was hidden. He was a powerful-looking man, and, like the colonel held a pistol in his hand.

"You are aware that dueling is forbidden in the Mexican army," he said, "so take my advice, sir, and put up that pistol, which, if it exploded, might entail very disagreeable consequences for you."

"Lower your weapon, first," the colonel said, coldly, "and then I will see what I have to do."

"Very good," the other remarked, still smiling, as he thrust his pistol into his belt. The colonel imitated him.

"And now," the stranger continued, "I have to converse with you; but, you see, this spot is badly chosen for a secret interview."

"That is true," the colonel interrupted, frankly, assuming the tone of the singular man with whom he had so unexpectedly met.

"I am delighted that you are of my opinion. Well, colonel, as it is so, be kind enough to accompany me and I will lead you to a spot which is perfectly adapted for our interview."

"I am at your orders, caballero," the colonel answered, with a bow.

"Come, then," the stranger added, as he made a start.

The colonel followed him. The stranger led him to where he had tied his horse, by the side of which another was now standing.

"Let us mount," he said.

"What for?" the young officer asked.

"To be off, of course. Are you not returning to Galveston?"

"Certainly; still—"

"Still," the stranger interrupted, "you would have had no objection to prowl a little longer round the rancho, I presume!"

"I confess it."

"Well, on my honor, you are wrong, for two excellent reasons: the first is, that you will learn nothing more than you have surmised,—that is to say, that the rancho is the head-quarters of the insurrection. You see that I am frank with you."

"I perceive it. And now, what is your second reason?"

"It is very simple: you run the risk of being saluted with a bullet, at any moment, and you know that the Texans are good marksmen."

"Certainly; but you know also that this reason possesses but slight value for me."

"I beg your pardon; courage does not consist, in my opinion, at least, in sacrificing one's life without reason: it consists, on the contrary, in being only killed for a good price,—that is to say, for a motive worth the trouble."

"Thanks for the lecture, caballero."

"Shall we be off?"

"At once, if you will be good enough to tell me who you are and where we are going?"

"I am surprised that you did not recognize me long ago, for we have been on very intimate terms."

"That may be; the sound of your voice is familiar, and I have heard it before, but it is impossible for me to recall either when or under what circumstances."

"By Heaven, colonel! you will allow me to remark that you have a preciously short memory. But since our last meeting, so many events have occurred, that it is not surprising you should have forgotten me. With one word I will recall everything to your mind—I am John Davis, the ex-slave-dealer."

"You!" the colonel exclaimed, with a start of surprise.

"Yes, I am that person."

"Ah! ah!" the colonel continued, as he crossed his arms haughtily and looked him in the face, "in that case we have an account to settle."

"I am not aware of the fact, colonel."

"You forget, Master Davis, in what manner you abused my confidence in order to betray me."

"If? You are in error, colonel. To do that I must have been a Mexican, which is not the case, thank Heaven! I served my country as you serve yours, that is all; each for himself in a revolution, you know."

"That proverb may suit you, Master Davis. I grant, but I only know one way of acting honorably, with uplifted head."

"Hum! there would be a good deal to say on that head, but it is not the question at this moment. The proof that you are mistaken and unjust toward me is, that a few minutes ago I held your life in my hands, and was unwilling to take it."

"You were wrong, for I swear to you that unless you defend yourself I shall take yours in a second," he said, as he cocked a pistol.

"You are in earnest, then?"

"Most earnest, be assured."

"You are mad," said Davis, with a shrug of his shoulders; "what strange ideas this of yours to insist on killing me?"

"Will you defend yourself; yes or no?"

"Wait a moment. What a man you are! there is no way of having an explanation with you."

"One word, then, but be brief."

"Why play with the butt of your pistol so? Vengeance is only real when complete. A shot fired would be the signal for your death, for you would be surrounded and attacked on all sides at once before you had even time to place a foot in the stirrup. You allow this, I suppose?"

"To the point, Master Davis, for I am in a hurry."

"You admit," the other said, with his old stoicism, "that I am seeking no unworthy subterfuge to avoid a meeting with you?"

"I know that you are a brave man."

"Thanks! I do not discuss the validity of the reason which makes you wish to exchange bullets with me. I pledge my word to be at your disposal on any day, and at any hour you please, with or without witnesses. Does that suit you?"

"Would it not be better to mount, gallop into the plain that stretches out before us, and settle the affair at once?"

"I should like to do so, but, unfortunately, I must, for the present, deprive myself of the pleasure. I repeat to you that we cannot fight, at least not at this moment."

"But the reason, the reason?" the young man exclaimed, with feverish impatience.

"The reason is this, as you absolutely insist on my telling it you: I am at this moment intrusted with very great interests; in a word, I am charged by the chief of the Texan army with a mission of the utmost importance to General Rubio, Military Governor of Galveston. You are too much of a gentleman not to understand that this prohibits me risking a life which does not belong to me."

The colonel bowed with exquisite politeness and uncocked the pistol, which he restored to his belt.

"I am confounded at what has taken place," he said. "You will excuse me, senior, for having allowed my passion to carry me away thus; I recognize how worthy and delicate your conduct has been under the circumstances. May I venture to hope you will pardon me?"

"Not another word about the past, colonel. So soon as I have terminated my mission, I shall have the honor of placing myself at your orders. Now, if nothing further keeps you here, we will proceed together to Galveston."

"I accept gladly the offer you make me. There is a truce between us; be good enough till further orders to consider and treat me as one of your friends."

"That is settled; I was certain we should end by

understanding each other. To horse, then, and let us start."

"I ask nothing better; still, I would observe that the night is half spent, and it will be impossible for us to find a boat in which to cross over to the island."

"That need not trouble you, colonel; I have a boat waiting for me, in which I shall be delighted to offer you a place."

"Hum! all the measures of your revolutionary gentlemen seem to be well taken."

"The reason is very simple; would you like to know it?"

"I confess that I am curious in the matter."

"It is because, up to the present, we have appealed to the hearts rather than the purses of our confidants. The hatred of the Mexican Government renders every intelligent man a devoted partisan; the hope of liberty gives us all we want; that is our whole secret. You are aware, colonel, that the spirit of opposition is innate in the heart of every man; insurrection or opposition, whichever you like to call it, is only that spirit organized."

"That is true," said the colonel, with a laugh.

The two enemies, temporarily friends, mounted and set out side by side.

After riding in silence for some time, John Davis suddenly drew rein and motioned to the colonel to do likewise.

"Have we arrived?" asked the latter.

"All but. The boat you see tossing about at the foot of the cliff will convey us to Galveston."

"But our horses?"

"Don't be uneasy; the owner of that wretched rancho will take all proper care of them."

John Davis raised a whistle to his lip and blew it twice sharply. Almost immediately the door of the rancho opened and a man appeared.

"Hallo! hallo, John!" Davis shouted.

"Is it you?" he asked.

"Yes; unless it be the demon who has assumed my face."

The fisherman shook his head with a dissatisfied air.

"Do not jest so, John Davis," he said; "the night is black and the sea rough; so the demon is about."

"Come, come, old porpoise," the American continued, "get your boat ready, for we have no time to lose. This senor is a friend of mine. Have you any alfalfa for our horses in your cabin?"

"I should think so. Eh, Pedriello, come hither, muchacho. Take the horses from the caballero, and lead them to the corral."

At this summons a tall young fellow came yawning from the rancho, and taking the horses by the bridle led them away without saying a word.

"Shall we go?" John Davis asked.

"Whenever you please," the fisherman growled.

"I hope you have men enough?"

"My two sons and I are, I should think, enough to cross the bay."

"You must know better than I."

"Then, why ask?" the fisherman said, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he proceeded toward the boat.

The two men followed him and found that he had not deceived them. The sea was bad, being rough and lumpy, and it required all the old sailor's skill to successfully cross the bay. Still, after two hours of incessant toil, the boat came alongside Galveston jetty, and disembarked its passengers safe and sound; then, without waiting for a word of thanks, the sailor disappeared in the obscurity.

"We part here," said John Davis, to the colonel; "for we each follow a different road. To-morrow morning at nine o'clock I shall have the honor of presenting myself at the general's house. May I hope that you have spoken to him of me in sufficiently favorable terms for him to grant me a kind reception?"

"I will do all that depends on myself."

"Thank you; and good-night."

"One word, if you please, before parting."

"Speak, colonel."

"A moment before your arrival, I saw four men, carrying a fifth, enter the rancho to which accident had brought me. Who is that man?"

"I know no more about him than you do. All I can tell you is, that he was picked up dying on the beach, at eleven o'clock at night, by some of our men stationed as vedettes to watch the bay. Now, who he is, or where he comes from, I do not know at all. He is covered with wounds; when picked up he held an ax still clutched in his hand, which makes me suppose that he belonged to the crew of the *Libertad* corvette, which our friends so successfully boarded. That is all the information I am able to give you. Is it all you wish to know?"

"One word more. Who is the man I saw at the rancho, and to whom the persons with him gave the name of Don Benito?"

"As for that man you will soon learn to know him. He is the supreme chief of the Texan revolution; but I am not permitted to tell you more. Good-by, till we meet again, at the general's."

"All right."

The two men, after bowing courteously, separated, and entered the town from opposite sides; the colonel proceeding to his house, and John Davis, in all probability, to crave hospitality from one of the numerous conspirators Galveston contained.

CHAPTER II.

A BARGAIN.

THERE is in the rapidity with which all news spreads a mystery which has remained up to the present, incomprehensible. It seems that an electric current bears them along at headlong speed, and takes a cruel pleasure in spreading them everywhere.

The most minute precautions had been taken by the Jaguar and El Alferez to keep their double expedition a secret until they found time to make certain arrangements necessary to secure the results of their daring attempts. The means of communication were at that period extremely rare and difficult. Only one man, Colonel Melendez, was cognizant of what had happened, and we have seen that it was impossible for him to have said anything. And yet, scarce two hours after the events we have described were accomplished, a vague rumor ran about the town.

This rumor, like a rising tide, swelled from instant to instant, and assumed gigantic proportions; the

truth, buried in a mass of absurd and impossible details, disappeared almost entirely to make way for a monstrous collection of reports, which terrified the population and plunged it into extreme anxiety.

Among other things, it was stated the insurgents were advancing on the town with a formidable fleet of twenty-five ships, having on board ten thousand troops, amply provided with cannon and ammunition. Nothing less was spoken of than the immediate bombardment of Galveston by the insurgents, large parties of whom, it was stated, were scouring the country to intercept all communications between the town and the mainland.

Terror never calculates or reasons. In spite of the material impossibility of the insurgents being able to collect so considerable a fleet and army, no one doubted the truth of the rumor, and the townspeople, with their eyes anxiously fixed on the sea, fancied in each gull whose wing flashed on the horizon, they saw the vanguard of the Texan fleet.

General Rubio was himself very much alarmed. If he did not place entire faith on these stupid rumors, still one of those secret forebodings, that never deceive, warned him that grave events were preparing, and would soon burst like a thunder-cloud over the town. The colonel's prolonged absence, whose motive the general was ignorant of, added still further to his anxiety.

Unfortunately, through its position and commerce, Galveston is a thoroughly American town, and the Mexican element is found there in but very limited proportions. The general was perfectly aware that the North Americans who represented the mercantile houses, sympathized with the revolution, and only waited for a favorable opportunity to raise the mask and declare themselves overtly. The Mexican population itself was not at all desirous of running the risk of a siege: it preferred an arrangement, no matter its nature, which would protect them. Money has no country, and hence, politically regarded, the population of Galveston cared very little whether it was Texan or Mexican, provided that it was not ruined.

In the midst of all this, the general felt embarrassed, because he had but a very weak armed force, incapable of keeping the population in check, if they desired to revolt. After vainly awaiting the colonel's return till eleven o'clock, the general resolved to summon to his house the most influential merchants of the town, in order to consult with them on means to protect individuals, and place the town in a position of defense, were that possible.

The merchants responded to the general's summons with eagerness. At about half an hour after midnight, the general's saloon was crowded: some thirty merchants, the elite of Galveston, were collected there.

His excellency, Don Jose Maria Rubio, was essentially a man of action, frank, loyal, and convinced that in all cases the best way of dealing is to go straight to the point. After the first compliments, he began speaking, and explained clearly and distinctly the state of their situation, and claimed the assistance of the notable inhabitants of the town to ward off the dangers that threatened it, promising, if that help were assured him, to hold out against the whole revolutionary army, and compel it to retire.

The merchants were far from expecting such a request, which literally stunned them. After consulting in whispers, the oldest and most influential of them undertook to reply in the names of all, and began speaking with that frankness which forms the basis of the Anglo-American character.

"Senor general," he said in a firm voice, "we are extremely pained by the sad news your excellency has thought it right to communicate to us, for none are more affected than ourselves by the calamities of our hapless country. We deplore in our hearts the situation into which Texas is suddenly cast, for we shall be the first assailed in our fortunes and affections. We should be glad to make the greatest sacrifices in order to prevent disasters and ward off the fearful catastrophe that menaces us. But alas! what can we do?—nothing. In spite of our good will and warm desire to prove to your excellency that you possess all our sympathies, our hands are tied. Our assistance, far from helping the Mexican Government, would, on the contrary, injure it, because the populace and vagabonds who flock to all seaports, and who are in a majority at Galveston, delighted at having found a pretext for disorder, would immediately revolt, apparently to defend the insurrection, but in reality to plunder us. This consideration, therefore, compels us most reluctantly to remain neutral."

"Reflect, senores," the general answered, "that the sacrifice I ask of you is but a trifle. Each of you will give me a thousand piastres; it is not too much, I suppose, to guarantee the security of your money and goods? for with the sum you collect, I pledge myself to preserve you from all harm by collecting a sufficient number of men to foil any expedition made against the town by the insurgents."

At this point-blank appeal the merchants made a frightful grimace, which the general did not appear to notice.

"The offering I claim from you at such a moment," he continued, "is not exorbitant; is it not just that in the hour of need you should come to the aid of a government under whose protection you have grown rich, and which, although it would have been perfectly justified in doing so, has, up to this day, demanded nothing from you?"

The merchants did not know what to answer. They were not desirous to give their money in the defense of a cause which their secret efforts tended on the contrary to destroy, but when thus pressed by the general, their embarrassment was extreme; they did not dare openly to refuse, and wished still less to say yes.

After leaving them a few moments for reflection, seeing that they could not make up their minds to answer him, he continued in his calmest voice and with his most pleasant air:

"I see, senores, that the reasons I have had the honor of laying before you have not convinced you, and I am really vexed at it. Unfortunately, we are in one of those fatal crises where long deliberations are impossible. Ever since the President of the Republic appointed me Military Chief of this State, I have ever been anxious to satisfy you, and not make you feel too heavily the weight of the power

intrusted to me, taking on myself, on several occasions, to modify any harshness in the orders I received from high quarters with reference to you. I venture to believe that you will do me the justice of saying that you have always found me kind and complaisant toward you."

The merchants naturally burst into affirmations as the general continued:

"Unfortunately it can no longer be so. In the face of this obstinate and unpatriotic refusal you so peremptorily give me, I am, to my great regret, constrained to carry out literally the orders I have received—orders that concern you, senores, and whose tenor, I repeat, I find myself utterly unable to modify."

At this declaration, made in a sarcastic voice, the merchants began shivering; they understood that the general was about to take a brilliant revenge, although they did not know yet what was about to happen. The general kept smiling, but the smile had something bitter and mocking in its expression, which was far from reassuring them. At this moment a clock standing on a bracket struck two.

"Caramba!" said the general, "is it so late as that already? How quickly time passes in your agreeable company. Senores, we must wind up the business. I should be in despair if I kept you longer from your homes—the more so, as you must be desirous of rest."

"In truth," stammered the merchant who had hitherto spoken in the name of all, "whatever pleasure we feel at being here—"

"You would feel greater pleasure still at being elsewhere," the general interrupted, with a laugh; "I perfectly understand that, Don Lionel, hence I will not abuse your patience much longer. I only ask you for a few minutes more, and then I will set you at liberty, so be kind enough to sit down."

The merchants obeyed while exchanging a glance of despair on the sly. The general seemed on this night to be deaf and blind, for he saw and heard nothing. He struck a bell; at the summons a door opened, and an officer walked in.

"Captain Saldana," the general asked, "is all ready?"

"Yes, general," the captain answered, with a respectful bow.

"Senores," the Governor continued, "I have received from the Mexican Government orders to lay on the rich merchants of this town a war-tax of sixty thousand piastres in cash. As you are aware, senores, a soldier can only obey. Still, I have taken on myself to reduce this contribution by one-half, desiring to prove to you up to the last moment, the interest I take in you. You would not understand me; nothing is now left me save obedience. Here is the order," he added, as he took a paper from the table and unfolded it, "it is peremptory; still, I am ready to grant you five minutes to make up your minds; but when that period has elapsed, I shall be compelled to do my duty, and you are sufficiently well acquainted with me, senores, to know that I shall do it at all hazards."

"But, general," the old merchant hazarded, "your excellency will permit me to observe that the sum is enormous."

"Nonsense, senores; there are thirty of you—it only amounts to two thousand piastres per head, which is only a trifle to you."

"Business has been very flat for some years, and money is becoming excessively scarce."

"To whom do you say that, Don Lionel? I fancy I am better aware of that fact than anybody else."

"Perhaps if you were to grant us a delay of a fortnight, we might manage to scrape together one-half the amount."

"Unfortunately, I cannot grant you an hour."

"In that case, general, it is impossible."

"Nonsense! I feel certain that you have not reflected. Besides, that is no affair of mine; in asking you for this money, I carry out the orders I have received; it is for you to judge whether you will consent or not. I, personally, am completely out of the affair."

"Really, general," the old merchant continued, deceived, in spite of all his craft, by the governor's tone, "really, it is impossible for us to pay the smallest amount."

All bowed in affirmation, supporting the remarks of their spokesman.

"Very good," the general continued, still in a coolly mocking tone, "that is clearly understood, then. Still, you will not, I trust, render me responsible for the consequences which this refusal may entail on you."

"Oh, general, you cannot suppose that!"

"Thanks. You heard, captain?" he added, turning to the officer, who was standing motionless by the door; "order in the detachment."

"Yes, general."

And the officer quitted the room. The merchants gave a start of terror, for this mysterious order caused them to reflect seriously, and their anxiety became the greater, when they heard the clang of arms in the patios, and the heavy foot-falls of approaching troops.

"What is the meaning of this, general?" they cried, in terror, "can we have fallen into a trap?"

"What do you mean?" the general said. "Oh, I beg your pardon, but I forgot to communicate to you the end of this order, which concerns you particularly; however, that will be soon done. I am instructed to have all persons shot who refuse to subscribe to the loan demanded by the government, in order to get over the serious embarrassments the malcontents occasion it."

At the same instant the doors were thrown wide open, and a detachment of fifty men silently surrounded the American merchants. The latter were more dead than alive. Certain that the general would not hesitate to execute the threat he made them, the merchants did not know how to get out of the scrape. The Governor himself had made no change in his demeanor—his face was still gracious, and his voice gentle.

"Come, senores," he said, "pray accept my heartfelt sympathy. Captain, lead away these gentlemen, and treat them with all the kindness their sad position claims."

He then bowed, and prepared to leave the room.

"One moment," the old merchant said, quite appalled by the approach of death; "are there no means of settling this business, general?"

"I only know one—paying."

"I am well aware of that," he said, with a sigh; "but, alas! we are ruined."

"What can I do?"

"Alas," the poor merchants exclaimed, in chorus, "you will not kill us, surely, general; we are fathers of families! what will become of our wives and children?"

"I pity you, but, unfortunately, can do no more than that."

"General," they cried, falling at his knees, "in the name of what you hold dearest, have pity on us, we implore you."

"I am really in despair at what has occurred, and should like to come to your aid; unhappily, I do not see my way, and then, again, you do nothing to help me."

"Alas!" they repeated, sobbing and clasping their hands desperately.

"I am well aware that you have not the money, and there is the insurmountable difficulty, believe me. However, let us see," he added.

There was a rather lengthened silence, during which you might have heard the heart-throbs of these men, who knew that life and death depended on the man who held them panting under his eye.

"Listen," he continued, "this is all I can do for you, and, believe me, that, in acting thus, I assume an enormous responsibility; there are thirty of you, I think?"

"Yes, excellency," they exclaimed, unanimously.

"Well, only ten of you shall be shot. You shall select them yourselves, and those you designate will be immediately led into the patio and executed. But now, ask me for nothing further, as I shall be constrained to refuse you; and that you may have time to make your selection carefully, I grant you ten minutes."

This was a proof of incontestable cleverness on the part of the general. By breaking the agreement that had hitherto prevailed among the merchants, by opposing them to one another, he was certain of obtaining the result wished for. For we prefer to suppose, for the honor of the general, whose career up to this day had been so free from excesses, and acts of this nature, that the threat of death was only a mode employed to cause these men, whom he knew to be opposed to the government he represented, into undoing their purse-strings, and that he would not have been so cruel as to shoot in cold blood thirty of the most respectable townsmen.

Whatever General Rubio's intentions might have been, however, the Americans believed him, and acted accordingly. After two or three minutes' hesitation, the merchants came one after the other to give their consent to the loan. But their tergiversation had cost them a thousand dollars apiece.

Still, the general did not let them off so cheaply. The Americans were led home one after the other by four soldiers and an officer, whose instructions were to shoot the prisoner at the slightest attempt to escape, and it was not till the general had the two thousand piastres in his hands that a second prisoner was sent home in the same manner. This went on until the whole sum was collected, and the only persons remaining in the saloon were the general and old Lionel.

"Oh, excellency!" he said, reproachfully, "how is it possible that you, who have hitherto been so kind to us, could have had the thought of committing such an act of cruelty?"

The general burst out laughing.

"Do you imagine I would have done it?" he said, with a shrug of his shoulder.

The merchant struck his forehead with a gesture of despair.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "we were idiots."

"Hang it, did you have such a bad opinion of me? Caramba, señor, I do not commit such acts as that."

"Ah," the merchant said, with a laugh, "I have not paid yet."

"Which means?"

"That now I know what I have to expect. I shall not pay."

"Really, I believed you cleverer than that."

"Why so?"

"What? you do not understand that a man may hesitate to execute thirty persons, but when it comes to only one man, who, like yourself, has a great number of misdeeds on his conscience, his execution is considered an act of justice, and carried out without hesitation?"

"Then you would shoot me?"

"Without the slightest remorse."

"Come, come, general, you are decidedly stronger than I am."

"You flatter me, Señor Lionel."

"No, I tell you what I think; it was cleverly played."

"You are a judge."

"Thanks," he answered, with a modest smile. "To spare you the trouble of having me executed, I will execute myself," he added, good-temperedly, as he felt his coat pocket.

He drew out a pocket-book crammed with Bank of England notes, and made up the sum of two thousand piastres, which he laid on the table.

"I have now only to thank you," the general said, as he picked up the notes.

"And I you, excellency," he answered.

"Why so?"

"Because you have given me a lesson by which I shall profit when the occasion offers."

"Take care, Señor Lionel," the general said, meaningly; "you will not, perhaps, come across a man so good-natured as myself."

The merchant restored the portfolio to his pocket, bowed to the general, and went out. It was three o'clock; all had been finished in less than an hour.

"Poor scamps, after all, those gringos," the general said when he was alone; "oh, if we had not to deal with mountaineers and campesinos we should soon settle this population."

"General," said an aide-de-camp, as he opened the door, "Colonel Melendez asks whether you will deign to receive him, in spite of the late hour?"

"Of course; show him in at once."

In a few minutes the colonel appeared.

"Here you are at last," the general cried, as he rose to meet him; "I fancied you were either dead or a prisoner."

"It was a toss up that one of the two events did not happen."

"Oh, oh! then you have something serious to tell me."

"Most serious, general."

"Hang it, my friend, take a chair and let us talk."

"Before all, general," the colonel remarked, "do you know our position?"

"What do you mean?"

"Only, general, that you may possibly be ignorant of certain events that have happened."

"I think I have heard grave events rumored, though I do not exactly know what has happened."

"Listen, then! the *Libertad* corvette is in the hands of the insurgents."

"Impossible!" the general exclaimed, bounding in his chair.

"General," the young officer said, in a mournful voice, "I have to inform you of something more serious still."

"Pardon me, my friend, perhaps I am mistaken, but it seems to me highly improbable that you could have obtained such positive news during the pleasure trip you have been making."

"Not only, general, have the insurgents seized the *Libertad*, but they have also made themselves masters of the Fort of the Point."

"Oh!" the general shouted, as he arose passionately, "this time, colonel, you are badly informed; the Fort of the Point is impregnable."

"It was taken in an hour by thirty Freebooters, commanded by the Jaguar."

The general hid his face in his hands, with an expression of despair impossible to render.

"Oh! it is too much at once," he exclaimed.

"That's not all," the colonel continued, sharply.

"What have you to tell me more terrible than what you have just said?"

"A thing that will make you leap with rage and blush with shame, general."

The old soldier laid his hand on his heart, as if wishful to arrest its hurried beating, and then said to the colonel, in a tone of supreme resignation—

"Speak, my friend; I am ready to hear all."

The colonel remained silent for some minutes; the despair of the brave old soldier made him shiver.

"General," he said, "perhaps it would be better to defer till to-morrow what I have to say to you; you appear fatigued, and a few hours, more or less, are not of much consequence."

"Colonel Melendez," the general said, giving the young officer a searching glance, "under present circumstances a minute is worth an age. I order you to speak."

"The insurgents request a parley," the colonel said, distinctly.

"To parley with me?" the general answered, with an almost imperceptible tinge of irony in his voice.

"These caballeros do me a great honor. And what about, pray?"

"As they think themselves capable of seizing Galveston, they wish to avoid bloodshed by treating with you."

The general rose, and walked sharply up and down the room for some minutes. At length he stopped before the colonel.

"And what would you do in my place?"

"I should treat," the young officer replied, unhesitatingly.

CHAPTER III.

THE RETREAT.

AFTER this frankly expressed opinion there was a rather lengthened silence, and the colonel was the first to resume the conversation.

"General," he went on, "you evidently know nothing of the events that have occurred during the last four-and-twenty hours."

"How could I know anything? These demons of insurgents have organized guerrillas, who hold the country and so thoroughly intercept the communications, that out of twenty spies I have sent out, not one has returned."

"And not one will return, be assured."

"What is to be done, then?"

"Do you really wish for my advice, general?"

"On my honor, I desire to know your real opinion; for you are the only one among us, I fancy, who really knows what is going on."

"I am aware of it. Listen to me, then, and do not feel astonished at anything you may hear, for all is positively true. The information I am about to communicate to you was given me by the Jaguar himself, scarce three hours back, at the Salto del Frayle, whither he invited me to come to converse about some matters in no way connected with politics."

"Very good," the general remarked, with a slight smile. "Go on, I am listening to you with the deepest attention."

The colonel felt himself blush under his chief's slightly ironical smile; still he recovered himself, and continued:

"In two words, this is our position; while a few bold men, aided by a privateer brig under the American flag, carried by surprise the *Libertad*—"

"One of the finest ships in our navy!" the general interrupted with a sigh.

"Yes, general, but unhappily it is now an accomplished fact. While this was taking place, other insurgents, commanded by the Jaguar in person, got into the Fort of the Point, and carried it almost without a blow."

"But what you tell me is impossible!" the old soldier interrupted with a burst of passion.

"I tell you nothing that is not rigorously true, general."

"The vague rumors that have reached me, led me to suppose that the insurgents had dealt us a fresh blow; but I was far from suspecting such a frightful catastrophe."

The general, suffering from a fury which was the more terrible as it was concentrated, walked up and down the room, clinching his fists, and muttering broken sentences. The colonel looked after him sadly, not dreaming of offering him any of those conventional consolations which, far from offering any relief to pain, only render it sharper and more poignant. At the end of some minutes, the general succeeded so far in mastering his emotion as to draw back to his heart the annoyance he felt. He sat down again by the colonel's side, and took his hand kindly.

"You have not yet given me your advice," he

said with the ghost of a smile. "The opinion of a man of your merit is always precious, and I am curious to know if we think alike."

"Be it so, general. This is what I think: we have but insufficient forces to sustain an assault effectively. The town is very badly disposed toward us; I am convinced that it only wants an opportunity to rise and make common cause with the insurgents. On the other hand, it would be a signal act of folly to shut ourselves up in a town with an issue, where we should be forced to surrender. For the present, we have no succor to expect from the government of Mexico, which is too much engaged in defending itself against the ambitious men of every description who hold it continually in check."

"What you say is unfortunately true; we must reckon on ourselves alone."

"Now, if we shut ourselves up in the town, it is evident to me that we shall be compelled eventually to surrender. As the insurgents are masters of the sea, it is a mere question of time. On the other hand, if we quit it of our own free will, the position will be singularly simplified."

"But, in that case, we shall be compelled to treat with these scoundrels?"

"I thought so for an instant; but I believe we can easily avoid that misfortune."

"In what way? speak, speak, my friend."

"The flag of truce the insurgents send you, will not arrive at the cabildo till nine in the morning; what prevents you, general, evacuating the town, ere he makes his appearance?"

"Hum!" said the general, growing more and more attentive to the young man's remarks. "Then you propose flight to me?"

"Not at all," the colonel retorted; "remember, general, that the position is admitted, that in war, retreating is not flying. If we render ourselves masters of the country by leaving the town to the insurgents, by this skillful retreat we place them in the difficult position in which we are to-day. In the open plains, and through our discipline, we shall be enabled to hold our own against a force four times our strength, which would not be possible here; then, when we have obtained those reinforcements Santa Anna will probably himself bring us ere long, we will re-enter Galveston, which the insurgents will not attempt to defend against us. Such is my opinion, general."

"Yes," the general answered, "the advice you offer would have some chance of success, were it possible to follow it. Unluckily, it would be madness to reckon on Santa Anna's support; he would allow us to be crushed, not perhaps of his own will, but compelled by circumstances, and impeded by the constant obstacles the Senate creates for him."

"I cannot share your opinion on that point, general; be well assured that the Senate, ill-disposed though it may be to the President of the Republic, is no more desirous to lose Texas than he is. Besides, under the present circumstances, it would be great madness for us to await here the enemy's attack."

The general seemed to hesitate for some minutes, then, suddenly forming a determination, he rung a bell. An aide-de-camp appeared.

"Let all the general officers assemble here within half an hour," he said.

The aide-de-camp bowed, and left the room.

"You wish it," the general continued, turning to the colonel; "well, be it so, I consent to follow your advice. Besides, it is, perhaps, the only chance of safety left us at this moment."

The corps d'armee placed under the command of General Rubio, and shut up with him in Galveston, only amounted to nine hundred and fifty officers and men, to whom might be added some three hundred lanceros scattered in little posts of observation along the coast. Though incapable of effectually defending the town, this force, well directed, might hold in check for a long time the worse armed, and certainly worse-disciplined insurgents.

The general had seen the value of the colonel's advice, and accepted it at once. Still, it was necessary to act with dispatch; the sun was rising, and the coming day was Sunday; hence it was important that the army should have evacuated the town before the end of mass, that is to say, eleven in the morning, for the following reason:

In all the slave States, and especially in Texas, a strange custom exists, reminding us distantly of the Lupercalia of ancient Rome. On a Sunday masters grant their slaves entire liberty. These poor slaves, who seek compensation for six days of hard servitude, enjoy with childish delight their few holiday hours; not caring a whit for the torrid heat that transforms the streets into perfect ovens, they spread over the town singing, dancing, or galloping at full speed in carts belonging to their masters which they have appropriated. On this day the town belongs to them, they behave almost as they please, no one interfering or trying to check their frolic.

General Rubio rightly feared lest the merchants of Galveston, whom he had so cleverly compelled to disgorge, might try to take their revenge by exciting the slaves to mutiny against the Mexicans, and they would probably be ready enough to do so, delighted at finding a pretext for disorder, without troubling themselves further as to the more or less grave results of their mutiny. Hence, while his aide-de-camp performed the commission he had intrusted to him, General Rubio ordered Colonel Melendez to take with him all the soldiers on duty at the cabildo, place himself at their head, and seize the requisite number of boats for the transport of the troops to the main land.

The colonel, without losing a moment, went to the port, and not experiencing the slightest opposition from the captains and masters, assembled a flotilla of fifteen light vessels, amply sufficient for the transport of the garrison. In the mean while, the aide-de-camp had performed his duties with intelligence and celerity, so that within twenty minutes all the Mexican officers were collected at the general's house.

The latter, without losing a moment, explained to them in a voice that admitted of no reply, the position in which the capture of the fort placed the garrison, the necessity of not letting the communication with the main land be cut off, and his intention of evacuating the town with the least possible delay. The officers, as the general expected, were unanimous in applauding his resolution, for in their

hearts they were not at all anxious to sustain a siege in which only hard blows could be received.

Orders were immediately given by the general to march the troops down to the quay with arms and baggage; still, in order to avoid any cause for disorder, the movement was executed very slowly, and the colonel, who presided over the embarkation, was careful to establish numerous posts at the entrance of each street leading to the port, so that the populace were kept away from the soldiers, and no disputes were possible between them. So soon as one boat had its complement it pushed off, though it did not start, as the general wished the entire flotilla to leave the town together.

It was a magnificent day, the sun dazzled, and the bay sparkled like a burning-glass. The people, kept at a distance by the bayonets of the soldiers, watched in gloomy silence the embarkation of the troops.

When all the soldiers, with the exception of those intended to protect the retreat of their comrades, had embarked, the general sent for the alcade mayor, the juez de letras, and the corregidor. These magistrates came to the general, concealing, but poorly, under a feigned eagerness, the secret alarm caused them by the order they had just received. In spite of the rapidity with which the troops effected their embarkation, it was by this time nearly nine o'clock. At the moment when the general was preparing to address the magistrates whom he had so unexpectedly convened, Colonel Melendez entered the cabildo, and after bowing respectfully to the governor, said:

"General, the person to whom I had the honor of referring last night is awaiting your good pleasure."

"Ah! ah!" the general replied, biting his mustache with an ironical air, "is he there, then?"

"Yes, general; I have promised to act as his introducer to your excellency."

"Very good. Request the person to enter."

"Does your excellency intend to confer with him in the presence of witnesses?"

"Certainly. Bring in the person, my dear colonel."

The colonel withdrew and in a few moments returned, bringing John Davis with him. The American had changed his dress for one more appropriate to the circumstances. His demeanor was grave, and step haughty, though not arrogant. On entering the room he bowed to the general courteously, and prepared to address him. General Rubio returned his bow with equal courtesy, but stopped him by a sign.

"Pardon me, sir," he said to him, "be kind enough to excuse me for a few moments. Perhaps, after listening to what I shall have the honor of saying to these caballeros, you will consider your mission to me as finished."

The American made no further reply than a bow, and waited.

"Senores," the general then said, addressing the magistrates, "orders I have this moment received compel me to leave the town at once with the troops. I have the honor to command. During my absence I intrust the direction of affairs to you, feeling convinced that you will act in all things prudently and for the common welfare. Still, you must be cautious not to let yourselves be influenced by evil counsels, or led by certain passions to which I will not allude now, particularly here. On my return, which will not be long delayed, I shall ask of you a strict account of your acts during my absence. Weigh my words carefully, and be assured that nothing you may do will be concealed from me."

"Then, general," the Alcade said, "that is the motive of the movement of the troops we have witnessed this morning. Do you really intend to depart?"

"You have heard me, senor."

"Yes, I have heard you, general; but in my turn, in my capacity as magistrate, I will ask you by what right you, the military governor of the State, leave one of its principal ports to its own resources in the present critical state of affairs, when the revolution is before our gates, and make not the slightest attempt to defend us? Is it really acting as defenders of this hapless town thus to withdraw, leaving it, after your departure, a prey to that anarchy which, as you are aware, only the presence of your forces has hitherto prevented breaking out? The burden you wish to lay upon us, general, we decline to accept; we will not assume the responsibility of so heavy a task; we cannot bear the penalty of another person's faults. The last Mexican soldier will scarcely have left the town, ere we shall have handed in our resignations, not being at all desirous to sacrifice ourselves for a government whose conduct toward us is stamped with egotism and cold-blooded cruelty. That is what I have to say to you in my name and in that of my colleagues. Now, in your turn, you will act as you think proper, but you are warned that you can in no way reckon upon us."

"Ah, ah, senores!" the general exclaimed, with an angry frown, "is that the way you venture to act? Take care, I have not gone yet; I am still master of Galveston, and can institute a severe example before my departure."

"Do so, general, we will undergo without a murmur any punishment you may please to inflict on us, even were it death."

"Very good," the general replied, in a voice quivering with passion; "as it is so, I leave you free to act, according to circumstances. But you will have a severe account to render to me, and that perhaps shortly."

"Not we, excellency, for your departure will be the signal of our resignation."

"Then you have made up your mind to plunge the country into anarchy?"

"What can we do? What means have we to prevent it? No, no, general, we are not the persons who deserve reproach."

General Rubio in his heart felt the logic of this reasoning; he saw perfectly well how cruel his conduct was toward the townsmen, whom he surrendered, without an means of defense, to the fury of the popular passion. Unfortunately, the position was no longer tenable—the town could not be defended, hence he must depart, without answering the Alcade; for what reply could he have made him? The general gave his aides-de-camp a sign to follow him, and prepared to leave the cabildo.

"Pardon me for detaining you for a moment, general," John Davis said: "but I should have liked to have a short conversation with your excellency, prior to your departure."

"For what good object, sir?" the general answered, sharply; "did you not hear what was said in this room? Return to those who sent you, and report to them what you have seen, that will be sufficient."

"Still, general," he urged, "I should have desired—"

"What?" the general interrupted, and then added, ironically, "To make me proposals, I presume, on the part of the insurgents. Know, sir, that whatever may happen, I will never consent to treat with rebels. Thank Colonel Melendez, who was kind enough to introduce you to my presence. Had it not been for his intervention I should have had you hung as a traitor to your country. Begone!—or stay!" he added, on reflection; "I will not leave you here after I am gone. Seize this man!"

"General, take care," the American replied. "I am intrusted with a mission; arresting me is a violation of the law of nations."

"Nonsense, sir," the general continued, with a shrug of his shoulders, "why, you must be mad? Do I recognize the right of the persons from whom you come to send me a flag of truce? Do I know who you are? Viva Dios! in what age are we living, then, that rebels dare to treat on equal terms with the government against which they have revolted? You are my prisoner, sir! But be at your ease; I have no intention of illtreating you, or retaining you any length of time. You will accompany us to the mainland, that is all. When we have arrived there you will be free to go wherever you please; so you see, sir, that those Mexicans, whom you like to represent in such dark colors, are not quite so ferocious as you would have them supposed."

"We have always rendered justice to your heart and loyalty, general."

"I care very little for the opinion you and yours have of me. Come on, sir."

"I protest, general, against this illegal arrest."

"Protest as much as you please, sir, but follow me!"

As resistance would have been madness, Davis obeyed.

"Well," he said, with a laugh, "I follow you, general. After all, I have not much cause to complain, for everything is fair in war."

They went out. In spite of the dazzling brilliancy of the sun, whose beams spread a tropical heat through the town, the entire population incumbered the streets and squares. The multitude was silent, however; it witnessed with calm stoicism the departure of the Mexican army; not an effort was made to break the cordon of sentries drawn up on the fort. When the general appeared, the crowd made way respectfully to let him pass, and many persons saluted him.

The old soldier advanced with a calm step, talking loudly with his officers, and courteously returning the bows he received, with smiling face and assured demeanor. He reached the port in a few minutes, and at his order the last soldiers embarked. The general, with no other weapon but his sword, remained for some minutes almost alone in the midst of the crowd that followed him to the quay. Two aides-de-camp alone accompanied him. John Davis had already entered a boat, which took him on board the schooner, in which the general himself intended to cross.

"General," one of the aides-de-camp said, "all the troops have embarked, and we are now only waiting your excellency's pleasure."

"Very good, captain," he answered. He then turned to the magistrates, who had walked by his side from the cabildo. "Farewell, senores," he said, taking off his hat, whose white plumes swept the ground, "farewell, till we meet again. I pray Heaven, from my heart, that, during my short absence, you will be able to avoid the scenes of disorder and anarchy. We shall meet again sooner than you may possibly suppose. Long live Mexico!"

"Long live Mexico!" the two officers shouted. The crowd remained dumb; not a man took up the general's shout. He shook his head sadly, bowed for the last time, and went down into the boat waiting for him. Two minutes later the Mexican flotilla had left Galveston.

"When shall we return?" the general muttered, sadly, with eyes fixed on the town, whose buildings were slowly disappearing from sight.

"Never!" John Davis whispered in his ear; and this prophetic voice affected the old soldier to the depth of his heart, and filled it with bitterness.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN DAVIS.

THE Mexican flotilla, favored by a good breeze, accomplished the passage from the island to the mainland in a very brief period. The brig and corvette, anchored under the battery of the fort, made no move to disturb the general; it was evident that the Texans did not suspect the events taking place at this moment, but were awaiting the return of their Envoy.

Colonel Melendez had seized the few boats capable of standing out to sea in Galveston harbor, so that the magistrates could not, had they wished it, have sent a boat to the Texans to inform them of the departure of the Mexican garrison. The general's resolution had been formed so suddenly, and executed with such rapidity, that the partisans of the revolution in the town, felt embarrassed by the liberty so singularly granted them, and did not know how to enter into communication with their friends, whose position they were ignorant of. Only one man could have enlightened them, and he was John Davis. But General Rubio, foreseeing what would have inevitably happened had he left the ex-slave-dealer behind him, carried him off with him.

The landing of the troops was effected under favorable conditions. The point they steered for was in the hands of the Mexicans, who had a strong detachment there, so that the army got ashore without arousing the slightest suspicion. The general's first care, was to send spies in every direction, in order to discover the enemy's plans, and whether they were preparing to make a forward movement.

The boats which had been used to convey the troops were drawn up on the beach, through fear lest the insurgents might make use of them. Two schooners, however, on each of which two guns were put, received orders to cruise in the bay, and

pick up all boats the inhabitants of Galveston might attempt to send off to the chief of the Texan army.

The banks of the Rio Trinidad are bordered by rushes and reeds, and covered with mangroves, amid which sport thousands of flamingoes, cranes, herons, and wild ducks, which cackle noisily as they swim about in tranquil and transparent waters.

On the side of a hill that descends in a gentle slope to the river, glisten the white walls of some twenty cottages, with their flat roofs and green shutters, hanging in clusters from the side of the hill, and hidden amid the foliage. These few cottages, built so far from the noise of the world, constitute the rancho of San Isidro.

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of this obscure nook, General Rubio came suddenly to trouble their peace, and recall them rather roughly to the affairs of this world. In fact, from this species of eagles' nests, nothing was easier than for the general to send his columns in all directions. The Mexican army, therefore, marched straight on the rancho of San Isidro, where it arrived about mid-day. At this unexpected appearance of the troops, the inhabitants were terrified and hastily gathering their most valuable articles, they left their houses and fled to the woods.

The Mexicans therefore remained sole possessors of the rancho, whose appearance was completely changed within a few hours. Tall trees, flowers, and lianas, nothing was respected. Enormous masses of wood lay that same evening on the ground, which they had so long protected with their beneficent shadow.

When all the approaches to the forest had been cleared for a radius of about twelve hundred yards, the general had the place surrounded by powerful barricades, which transformed the peaceful village into a fortress almost impregnable, with the weak resources the insurgents possessed. The trees on the interior of the rancho were alone left standing, to conceal from the enemy the strength of the corps encamped at this spot.

The house of the Indian Alcade, somewhat larger and more comfortably built than the rest, was selected by the general as head-quarters. This house stood in the center of the pueblo; from it the country could be surveyed for a great distance, and no movement in Galveston roads escaped notice.

At sunset all the preliminary preparations were finished, and the rancho rendered safe against a *coup de main*. About seven in the evening the general was sitting in front of the house in the shadow of a magnificent magnolia, whose graceful branches crossed above his head, smoking a papillo, while conversing with several of his officers, when an aide-de-camp came up and told him that the person who had come to him that morning from the rebels, earnestly requested the favor of a few minutes' conversation. The general gave an angry start, and was about to refuse, when Colonel Melendez interposed, representing to the general that he could not do so without breaking his word, which he had himself pledged in the morning.

"As it is so," the general said, "let him come."

"Why," the colonel continued, "refuse to listen to the propositions this man is authorized to offer you?"

"What good is it at this moment? there is always a time to do so if circumstances compel it. Now our situation is excellent; we have not to accept proposals, but, on the contrary, are in a position to impose those that may suit us."

These words were uttered in a tone that compelled the colonel to silence; he bowed respectfully, and withdrew softly from the circle of officers. At the same moment John Davis arrived, led by the aide-de-camp. The American's face was gloomy and frowning; he saluted the general by raising his hand to his hat, but did not remove it; then he drew himself up haughtily and crossed his hands on his chest. The general regarded him for a moment with repressed curiosity.

"What do you want?" he asked him.

"The fulfillment of your promise," Davis replied dryly.

"I do not understand you."

"When you made me a prisoner this morning, in contempt of the military code and the laws of nations, did you not tell me that so soon as we reached the mainland, the liberty you had deprived me of by an unworthy abuse of strength, would be immediately restored to me?"

"I did say so," the general answered meekly.

"Well, I demand the fulfillment of that promise; I ought to have left your camp long ago."

"Did you not tell me that you were deputed to me by the rebel army, in order to submit certain propositions?"

"Yes, but you refused to hear me."

"Because the moment was not favorable for such a communication. Imperious duties prevented me then giving your words all the attention that they doubtless deserve. Now I am ready to listen to you."

"There is one thing I wish to settle first."

"What is it?"

"Do you regard me as an envoy, or merely as your prisoner?"

"Why this question, whose purport I do not understand?"

"Pardon me, general," he said with an ironical smile, "but you understand me perfectly well, and so do these caballeros—if a prisoner, you have the right to force silence upon me; as a deputy, on the other hand, I enjoy certain immunities, under the protection of which I can speak frankly and clearly, and no one can bid me be silent, so long as I do not go beyond the limits of my mission. That is the reason why I wish first to settle my position with you."

"Your position has not changed to my knowledge. You are an envoy of rebels."

"Oh, you recognize it now?"

"I always did so."

"Very good. Be kind enough, general, to read this letter," he added, as he drew from his pocket a large envelope, which he handed to him.

Night had fallen some time before, and two soldiers brought up torches of acote-wood, which one of the aides-de-camp lit. The general opened the letter and read it attentively. When he had finished reading, he folded up the letter and thrust it into the breast of his uniform. There was a moment's silence, which the general at last broke.

"Who is the man who gave you this letter?"
 "Did you not read his signature?"
 "He may have employed a go-between."
 "With me, that is not necessary."
 "Then, he is here?"
 "I have not to tell you who sent me, but merely discuss with you the proposals contained in the letter."

The general gave a passionate start.
 "Reply, senior, to the questions I do you the honor of asking you," he said, "if you do not wish to have reasons for repenting."
 "What is the use of threatening me, general? You will learn nothing from me," he answered firmly.

"As it is so, listen to me attentively, and carefully weigh your answer, before opening your mouth to give it."

"Speak, general."
 "This moment—you understand, this moment, senior, you will confess to me, where the man is who gave you this letter, if not—"

"Well?" the American ironically interrupted.

"Within ten minutes you will be hanging from a branch of that tree, close to you."

Davis gave him a disdainful glance.

"On my soul," he said, ironically, "you Mexicans have a strange way of treating envoys."

"I do not recognize the right of a scoundrel, who is outlawed for his crimes, and whose head is justly forfeited, to send me envoys, and treat with me on an equal footing."

"The man whom you seek in vain to brand, general, is a man of heart, as you know better than anybody else. But gratitude is as offensive to you as it is to all haughty minds, and you cannot forgive the person to whom we allude, for having saved, not only your life, but also your honor."

John Davis might have gone on speaking much longer, for the general, who was as pale as a corpse, and whose features were contracted by a terrible emotion he sought in vain to master, seemed unable to utter a syllable. Colonel Melendez had quietly approached the circle. For some minutes he had listened to the words the speakers interchanged, with gradually augmenting passion; judging it necessary, therefore, to interpose ere matters had reached such a point as rendered any hope of conciliation possible, he said to John Davis, as he laid his hand on his shoulder:

"Silence! you are under the lion's claw; take care that it does not rend you."

"Under the tiger's claw you mean, Colonel Melendez," he exclaimed, with much animation. "What! shall I listen calmly to an insult offered the noblest heart, the greatest man, the most devoted and sincere patriot, and not defend him and confound his calumniator? Come, colonel, that would be cowardice, and you know me well enough to feel assured that no consideration of personal safety would force me to do so."

"Enough," the general interrupted him, in a loud voice, "that is right; under the influence of painful reminiscences I uttered words that I sincerely regret. I should wish them forgotten."

John Davis bowed courteously.

"General," he said, "I thank you for this retraction; I expected nothing less from your sense of honor."

The general made no answer; he walked rapidly up and down, suffering from a violent agitation.

The officers, astonished at this strange scene, which they did not at all understand, looked restlessly at each other, though not venturing to express their surprise otherwise. The general walked up to John Davis and stopped in front of him.

"Master Davis," he said to him, in a harsh and snapping voice, "you are a stout-hearted and rough-spoken man. Enough of this; return to the man who sent you, and tell him this: 'General Don Jose Maria Rubio will not consent to enter into any relations with you; he hates you personally, and only wishes to meet you sword in hand. No political question will be discussed between you and him until you have consented to give him the satisfaction he demands.' Engrave these words well in your memory, senior, in order to repeat them exactly to the said person."

"I will repeat them exactly."

"Very good. Now, begone, we have nothing more to say to each other. Colonel Melendez, be good enough to give this caballero a horse, and accompany him to the outposts."

"One word more, general; in what way shall I bring you the person's answer?"

"Bring it yourself, if you are not afraid to enter my camp a second time."

"You are well aware that I fear nothing, general. I will bring you the answer."

"I wish it; good-by."

"Farewell," the American answered.

And bowing to the company he withdrew, accompanied by the colonel.

"You played a dangerous game," the latter said, when they had gone a few steps; "the general might very easily have had you hung."

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"He would not have dared," he said, disdainfully.

"Oh, oh! and why not, if you please?"

"How does that concern you, colonel; am I not free?"

"You are."

"That must be sufficient for you, and prove to you that I am not mistaken."

The colonel led the American to his quarters, and asked him to walk in for a moment, while a horse was being got ready.

"Master Davis," he said to him, "be good enough to select from those weapons, whose excellence I guarantee, such as best suit you."

"Why so?" he remarked.

"Confound it! you are going to travel by night; you do not know whom you may meet. I fancy that under such circumstances it is prudent to take such precautions."

"That is true," the American said carelessly; "now that I come to think of it, the roads are not safe. As you permit me, I will take these pistols, this rifle, machete, and knife."

"As you please, but pray take some ammunition as well; without that your fire-arms would be of no service."

"By Jove! colonel, you think of everything, you are really an excellent fellow," he added, while

carelessly loading his rifle and pistols, and fastening to his belt a powder-flask and bullet-pouch.

"A truce, if you please, to further compliments. Here is your horse, which my assistant is bringing up."

"But he is leading a second; do you intend to accompany me beyond the advanced posts?"

"Oh, only for a few yards, if my company does not seem to you too wearisome."

"Oh, colonel, I shall always be delighted to have you for a companion."

All these remarks were made with an accent of excessive courtesy, in which could be traced an almost imperceptible tinge of fun and biting raillery. The two men left the house and mounted their horses. The night was limpid and clear; millions of stars sparkled in the sky, which seemed studded with diamonds; the moon spread afar its white and fantastic light; the mysterious night breeze bowed the tufted crests of the trees, and softly rippled the silvery waters of the Rio Trinidad, as they died away on the bank.

Passing the sentinels without being challenged they descended the hill, passed the main guard, and found themselves in the open country. Each of them yielded to the voluptuous calmness of nature, and seemed no longer to be thinking of his comrade. They proceeded thus for more than an hour, and reached a spot where two paths, in crossing, formed a species of fork, in the center of which stood a cross of evil omen.

As if by common accord, the two horses stopped and thrust out their heads, while laying back their ears and snorting loudly. Suddenly aroused from their reveries the two riders cast a scrutinizing glance around. No human sound disturbed the silence; all was calm and deserted.

"Do you intend, my dear colonel," the American asked, "to honor me with your society any longer?"

"No," the young man answered, bluntly, "I shall stop here."

"Ah!" John Davis continued, with feigned disappointment, "must we part so soon?"

"Oh no," the colonel answered, "not yet. You alone are to decide the time we shall remain together."

"It is impossible to display greater courtesy."

"Master Davis," the colonel said, raising his voice, "have you forgotten the last conversation we had together?"

"My dear colonel, you must know me well enough to be sure that I only forget those things which I ought not to remember."

"All the better. In that case your excellent memory spares me half the trouble, and we shall soon come to an understanding."

"I believe so."

"Do you not find the spot where we are admirably adapted for what we have to do?"

"I consider it delicious, my dear colonel."

"Then, with your consent, we will dismount?"

They leaped to the ground and tied up their horses.

"Do you take your rifle?" the American inquired.

"Yes, if you have no objection."

"Not at all. Then we are going to see some sport?"

"Oh, yes, but on this occasion the game will be human."

"Which will add greatly to the interest of the sport."

"Where shall we place ourselves?"

"I trust to you entirely for that."

"Look! on each side of the road are bushes, which seem to have grown for the express purpose."

"That is really singular. Well, we will each hide behind one of the bushes, count ten, and then fire."

"First rate; but suppose we miss? I am perfectly well aware that we are both first-rate marksmen, and that is almost impossible; but it might happen."

"In that case nothing is more simple; we will draw our machetes and charge each other."

"Agreed. Stay, one word more; one of us must remain on the ground, so promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"The survivor will throw the body into the river."

"All right, that is agreed."

"Thank you."

The two men bowed, and then went off in opposite directions, to take up their stations. The distance between them was about seventy yards; in a few seconds a double detonation burst forth like a clap of thunder, and awoke the echoes. The two adversaries then rushed on each other, machete in hand. They met nearly half-way, and not uttering a word, attacked each other furiously.

The combat lasted for a long time without any marked advantage for either, for they were nearly of equal strength, when all at once several men appeared, and, aiming at the two adversaries, ordered them to lay down their arms immediately. Each fell back a step, and waited.

"Stop!" the man shouted, who seemed to be the chief of the new-comers; "do you, John Davis, mount your horse and be off!"

"By what right do you give me that order?" the American asked, savagely.

"By the right of the stronger," the leader replied.

"Be off, if you do not wish a misfortune to happen to you!"

John Davis looked around him. Any resistance was impossible—for what could he have done alone, merely armed with a saber, against twenty individuals? The American stifled an oath, and mounted again, but suddenly reflecting, he asked: "And who may you be who dictate to me?"

"Well, I am a man to whom you and Colonel Melendez offered an atrocious insult. I am the Monk Antonio!"

At this name the two adversaries felt a thrill of terror run through their veins; without doubt the monk was about to avenge himself, now that in his turn he had them in his power.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE THE BATTLE.

JOHN DAVIS recovered almost immediately.

"Ah, ah!" he said, "then it is you, my master?"

"It astonishes you to meet me here."

"On my honor, no. Your place, in my opinion, is wherever a snare is laid; hence nothing is more natural than your presence."

"It is wrong, John Davis, for a man to take ad-

vantage of his weakness to insult people, especially when he is ignorant of their intentions."

"Ah, they appear to me tolerably clear at this moment."

The American leapt from his horse, drew his pistols from the holsters, and walked toward the monk with a most quiet step and thoroughly natural air.

"Why do you not go, as I advised you to do?"

Fray Antonio continued.

"For two reasons, my dear senior. The first is, that I have no orders or advice to receive from you; the second, because I shall not be sorry to be present at the pretty little act of scoundrelism you are meditating."

"Then your intention is—"

"To defend my friend, by Heaven!" the American exclaimed warmly.

"What! your friend?" the monk said, in amazement; "why, only a minute ago you were trying to take his life."

"My dear senior," Davis remarked, ironically, "there are certain remarks whose sense you unhappily never catch. Understand me clearly: I am ready to kill this gentleman, but I will not consent to see him assassinated. That is clear enough, hang it all!"

Fray Antonio laughed. "Singular man!" he said.

"Am I not?" Then turning to his adversary, who still stood perfectly quiet, he continued: "My dear colonel, we will resume, at a later date, the interesting interview which this worthy padre so untowardly interrupted. For the present permit me to restore you one of my pistols you so generously lent me; it is undoubted that these scamps will kill us; but, at any rate, we shall have the pleasure of settling three or four of them first."

"Thank you, Davis," the colonel answered, "I expected nothing less from you. I accept your proposition as frankly as you make it."

And he took the pistol and cocked it. The American took his place by his side, and bowed to the stranger with mocking courtesy.

"Senores," he said, "you can charge us whenever you think proper, for we are prepared."

"Ah, ah!" said Fray Antonio, "then you really mean it?"

"What!—mean it? The question seems to me somewhat simple; I suppose you think the hour and place well chosen for a joke?"

The monk shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the men who accompanied him.

"Be off!" he said. "In an hour I will join you again, you know where."

The strangers gave a nod of assent, and disappeared almost instantaneously among the trees and shrubs. The monk then threw his weapons on the ground, and drew so near to the men as almost to touch them.

"Are you still afraid?" he said; "it is I now who am in your power."

"Hullo!" Davis said, as he uncocked his pistol, "why, what is the meaning of this?"

"If, instead of taking me for a bandit, as you did, you had taken the trouble to reflect, you would have understood that I had but one object, and that was, to prevent the resumption of the obstinate fight which my presence so fortunately interrupted."

"But how did you arrive here so opportunely?"

"Accident did it all. Ordered by our commander-in-chief to watch the enemy's movements, I posted myself on the two roads, in order to take prisoner all the scouts who came in this direction."

"Then you do not owe either the colonel or myself any grudge?"

"Perhaps," he said, with hesitation, "I have not quite forgotten the unworthy treatment you inflicted on me; but have given up all thoughts of vengeance."

John Davis reflected for a moment, and then said, as he offered him his hand, "You are a worthy monk. I see that you are faithful to the pledge of amendment you made. I am sorry for what I did."

"I will say the same, senior," the colonel remarked; "I was far from expecting such generosity on your part."

"One word, now, senores."

"Speak," they said, "we are listening."

"Promise me not to renew that impious duel, and follow my example by forgetting your hatred."

The two men stretched out their hands with a simultaneous movement.

"That is well," he continued, "I am happy to see you act thus. Now let us separate. You, colonel, will mount and return to camp—the road is free, and no one will try to oppose your passing. As for you, John Davis, please to follow me. Your long absence has caused a degree of alarm which your presence will doubtless abate. I had orders to try and obtain news of you."

"Good-by for the present," the colonel said; "forget, Senior Davis, what passed between us at the outset of our meeting, and merely remember the manner in which we separate."

"May we, colonel, meet again under happier auspices, when I may be permitted to express to you all the sympathy with which your frank and loyal character inspires me."

After exchanging a few words more, and cordially shaking hands, the three men separated. Colonel Melendez set off at a gallop in the direction of the rancho, while the monk and Davis started at an equal pace in exactly the opposite direction. It was about midnight when the colonel reached the main guard, where an aide-de-camp of the general was waiting for him. A certain degree of animation appeared to prevail in the rancho. Instead of sleeping, as they might be expected to be doing at so late an hour, the soldiers were traversing the streets in large numbers; in short, an extreme agitation was visible everywhere.

"What is the matter?" the colonel asked the aide-de-camp.

"The general will tell you himself," the officer answered, "for he is impatiently expecting you, and has already asked several times for you."

The colonel pushed on, and in a few minutes found himself before the house occupied by the general. The house was full of noise and light; but so soon as the general perceived the young man, he left the officers with whom he was talking, and walked quickly toward him.

"Here you are at last," he said; "I was impatiently expecting you."

"What is the matter then?" the colonel asked,

astounded at the reception, which he was far from expecting, for he had left the camp so quiet, and found it on his return so noisy.

"You shall know, senores," the general added addressing the officers in the room; "be kind enough not to go away. I shall be with you in an instant. Follow me, colonel."

Don Juan bowed, and passed into an adjoining room, the door of which the general shut after him. Hardly were they alone, ere the general took the young man affectionately by one of his coat-buttons, and fixed on him a glance that seemed trying to read the depths of his heart.

"Since your departure," he said, "we have had a visit from a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?" the young man repeated.

"Or, at any rate, of a man who gives himself out as such."

"I only know one man in this country," the colonel replied distinctly, "who, despite the opinions that divide us, can justly assume that title."

"And that man is?"

"The Jaguar."

"Do you feel a friendship for him?"

"Yes."

"But he is a bandit."

"Possibly he is so to you, general; from your point of view, it is possible that you are right. I neither defend his character, nor condemn him; I am attached to him, for he saved my life."

"But you fight against him, for all that."

"Certainly; for being hurled into two opponent camps, each of us serves the cause that appears to him the better. But, for all that, we are not the less attached to each other in our hearts."

"I am not at all disposed to blame you, my friend, for our inclinations should be independent of our political opinions. But let us return to the subject which at this moment is the most interesting to us. A man, I say, presented himself during your absence at the outposts as being a friend of yours."

"That is strange," the colonel muttered, searching his memory; "and did he mention his name?"

"Of course; do you think I would have received him else? However, he is in this very house, for I begged him to await your return."

"But his name, my dear general?"

"He calls himself Don Felix Paz."

"Oh," the colonel exclaimed, eagerly, "he spoke the truth, general, for he is really one of my dearest friends."

"Then we can place in him—"

"Full and entire confidence; I answer for him on my head," the young officer interrupted, warmly.

"I am the more pleased at what you tell me, because this man assured me that he held in his hands means that would enable us to give the rebels a tremendous thrashing."

"If he promised it, general, he will do so without doubt. I presume you have had a serious conversation with him?"

"Not at all. You understand, my friend, that I was not willing, till I had previously conversed with you, to listen to this man, who after all might have been a spy of the enemy."

"Capital reasoning; and what do you propose doing now?"

"Hearing him; he told me enough, in view of what is happening at this moment, to have everything prepared for action; hence, no time will have been lost."

"Very good! we will listen to him, then."

The general clapped his hands, and an aide-de-camp came in.

"Request Don Felix to come hither, captain."

Five minutes later, the ex-major-domo of the Larchtree hacienda entered the room where the two officers were.

"Forgive me, caballero," the general said, courteously, as he advanced to meet him, "for the rather cold manner in which I received you; but unfortunately we live in a period when it is so difficult to distinguish friends from enemies, that a man involuntarily runs the risk of confounding one with the other, and making a mistake."

"You have no occasion to apologize to me, general," Don Felix answered; "when I presented myself at your outposts, I anticipated what would happen to me."

The colonel pressed his friend's hand warmly. An explanation was unnecessary for men of this stamp; at the first word they understood each other. They had a lengthened conversation, which did not terminate till a late hour of the night, or rather an early hour of the morning, for it struck four at the moment when the general opened the door of the room in which they were shut up, and accompanied them, conversing in whispers, to the *saguan* of the house.

What had occurred during this lengthened interview? No one knew; not a syllable transpired as to the arrangements made by the general with the two men who had remained so long with him. The officers and soldiers were suffering from the most lively curiosity, which was only increased by the general's orders to raise the camp.

Don Felix was conducted by the colonel to the outermost post, where they separated after shaking hands and exchanging only one sentence—

"We shall meet again soon."

The colonel then returned at a gallop to his quarters, while Don Felix buried himself in the forest, as fast as his horse could carry him. On returning to camp, the colonel at once ordered boot and saddle to be sounded, and without waiting for further orders, put himself at the head of about five hundred cavalry and left the rancho.

It was nearly five in the morning, the sun was rising in floods of purple and gold, and all seemed to promise a magnificent day. The general, who had mounted to his observatory, attentively followed with a telescope the movements of the colonel, who, through the speed at which he went, not only got down the hill within a quarter of an hour, but had also crossed, without obstacle, a stream as wide as the Rio Trinidad itself. A few moments subsequent they entered a forest, where they were speedily lost from sight.

When the last lancero had disappeared, and the landscape had become quite desolate, the general shut up his glass, and went down again, apparently plunged in serious thought. We have said that the garrison of Galveston consisted of nine hundred men; but this strength had been raised to nearly fourteen

hundred by calling in the numerous small posts scattered along the coast. Colonel Melendez had taken with him five hundred sabers the general left at the rancho, which he determined on retaining at all hazards as an important strategical point, two hundred and fifty men under the orders of a brave and experienced officer; and he had at his disposal about six hundred and fifty men, supported by a battery of four mountain howitzers.

This force, small as it may appear, was more than sufficient for the country. It is true that the Texan army counted nearly four thousand combatants, but the majority of these men were badly armed peasants, unskilled in the management of the warlike weapons which a movement of revolutionary fanaticism had caused them to take up, and incapable of sustaining in the open field the attack of skilled troops. Hence, in spite of his numerical inferiority, he reckoned greatly on the discipline and military education of his soldiers, to defeat this assemblage of men, who were more dangerous through their numbers than for any other reason.

The start from the rancho was effected with admirable regularity; the general had ordered that the baggage should be left behind, so that nothing might impede the march of the army. Each horseman, in accordance with the American fashion, took up a foot soldier behind him, so that the speed of the army was doubled. Numerous spies and scouts sent out to reconnoiter in every direction, had announced that the insurrectionary army, marching in two columns, was advancing to seize the mouth of Trinidad and cover the approaches to Galveston, a movement which it was of the utmost importance to prevent; for, were it successful, the insurgents would combine the movements of the vessel they had so advantageously seized with those of their army, and would be masters of a considerable extent of the seaboard, from which possibly the Mexican forces would not be strong enough to dislodge them. On the other hand, General Rubio had been advised that Santa Anna, President of the Republic, had left Mexico, and was coming with forced marches, at the head of twelve hundred men, to forcibly crush the insurrection.

General Rubio understood how important it was for him to deal a heavy blow before his junction with the President, who, while following his advice, would not fail, in the event of defeat, to attribute the reverses to him, while, if the Mexicans remained masters of the field, he would keep all the honor of victory to himself.

The Texan insurgents had not up to this moment dared to measure themselves with the Mexican troops in the open field, but the events that had succeeded each other during the last few days with lightning speed, had changed the aspect of affairs. The chiefs of the revolutionary army, rendered confident by their constant victories, felt the necessity of giving up their hedge warfare, and consolidating their success by some brilliant exploit.

To attain this end, a battle must be gained; but the Texan chiefs did not let themselves be deceived by the successes they had hitherto met with; on the contrary they feared the moment when they would have to face the veteran Mexican troops with their inexperienced guerrillas. Hence they sought by every means to retard the hour for this supreme and decisive contest, in which a few hours might eternally overthrow their dearest hopes.

After the capture of the fort a grand council had been held by the principal Texan chiefs, in order to consult on the measures to be taken. It was then resolved that the army should occupy Galveston, which its position rendered perfectly secure against a surprise; that the freebooters should alone remain out to skirmish with the Mexicans and harass them; while the troops shut up in the town were being drilled, and receiving a regular and permanent organization.

The first care of the chiefs, therefore, was to avoid any encounter with the enemy, and try to enter Galveston without fighting the Mexicans. The following was the respective position of the two armies; the Texans were trying to avoid a battle, which General Rubio was longing, on the contrary, to fight. The terrain on which the adversaries would have to maneuver was extremely limited, for scarce four leagues separated the vedettes of the two armies. From his observatory the general could clearly distinguish the camp-fires of the rebels.

In the mean while Colonel Melendez had continued to advance; on reaching the cross where he and John Davis had fought so furiously on the previous evening, the colonel himself examined the ground with the utmost care, then, feeling convinced that none of the enemy's flankers had remained ambushed, he gave his men orders to dismount. The horses were thrown down, secured, and their heads wrapped in thick blankets to prevent their neighing, and after all these precautions had been taken, the soldiers lay down on their stomachs among the shrubs, with instructions not to stir.

General Rubio had himself effected a flank march, which enabled him to avoid the crossways; immediately after descending the hill, he marched rapidly upon the river bank. We have said that the Rio Trinidad, which is rather confined at certain spots, bordered by magnificent forests, whose branches form on the bank grand arcades of foliage overhanging the mangroves; it was among the latter, and on the branches of the forest trees, about two gun-shots from the spot where he had landed, that the general ambuscaded about one-third of his infantry. The remainder, divided into two corps, were stationed along either side of the road the insurgents must follow; they were so hidden in the tall grass that they were invisible.

The four mountain howitzers crowned a small hill which, through its position, completely commanded the road, while the cavalry was massed in the rear of the infantry. The silence momentarily disturbed was re-established, and the desert resumed its calm and solitary aspect. General Rubio had taken his measures so well that his army had suddenly become invisible.

When it was resolved in the council of the Texan chiefs that the insurrectionary army should proceed to Galveston, a rather sharp discussion took place as to the means to be adopted in reaching it. The Jaguar proposed to embark the troops aboard the corvette, the brig, and a few smaller vessels collected for the purpose. Unfortunately this advice, excellent though it was, could not be followed, ow-

ing to General Rubio's precaution of carrying off all the boats; collecting others would have occasioned an extreme loss of time; but as the boats the Mexicans had employed were now lying high and dry on the beach, and the guard at first put over them withdrawn, the Texans thought it far more simple to set them adrift, and use them in their turn to effect the passage.

The council would not put faith in the assertions of John Davis, who in vain assured them that General Rubio, intrenched in a strong position, would not allow this movement to be carried out without an attempt to prevent it.

The mysterious man to whom we have alluded had alone the right to give orders, and the reasons urged by Davis could not convince him. Deceived by his spies, he persuaded himself that General Rubio, far from having any intention of recapturing Galveston, wished to effect his junction with Santa Anna before attempting any fresh offensive movement, and that the halt at the rancho had been merely a feint to embarrass the rebels.

The chiefs received orders to march forward, and were constrained to carry them out. The corvette and brig were ordered to get as near land as they could, in order to protect, by their cross-fire, the embarkation of the troops and sweep the Mexicans if they offered any opposition. Flying columns were sent off in advance and on the flanks of the army to clear the way by making prisoners of any small outposts the enemy might have established.

Four principal chiefs commanded strong detachments of mounted freebooters. The four were the Jaguar, Fray Antonio, El Alferez and Don Felix Paz, whom the reader assuredly did not expect to find under the flag of the rebels, and whom he saw only a few hours back enter the Mexican camp and hold a secret conference with General Rubio and Colonel Melendez. These four chiefs were ordered by the commander-in-chief to prevent any surprise, by searching the forests and examining the tall grass. El Alferez was on the right of the army, Fray Antonio on the left, the Jaguar had the rear guard, while Don Felix, with six hundred sabers, formed the van. One word as to the guerrillas of the ex-mayor-domo of the Larchtree hacienda. The men who composed his band, raised on land dependent on the hacienda, had been enlisted by Don Felix. They were *Indios mansos*, vaqueros and peons, mostly half savages, and rogues to a certain extent, who fought like lions at the order of their leader, to whom they were thoroughly devoted, but only recognizing and obeying him, while caring nothing for the other leaders of the army. Don Felix Paz had joined the insurgents about two months previously, and rendered them great service with his guerrillas.

By a singular coincidence the two armies left their camp at the same time, and marched one against the other, little suspecting that two hours later they would be face to face.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF CERRO PARDO.

The battle of Cerro Pardo was one of those sanguinary days whose memory a nation retains for ages as an ill-omened date.

The spot selected by the Mexicans to effect their landing after leaving Galveston had been very cleverly chosen by General Rubio. The stream, which for some distance is inclosed by high banks, runs through an extensive plain, covered with tall grass and clumps of trees, the last relics of a virgin forest, which the claims of trade have almost destroyed. This plain is closed by a canon inclosed between two lofty hills called Cerro Pardo and the Cerro Prieto—that is to say, the Red Mountain and the Black Mountain.

At the canon begins a road running to the cross we have before visited, which is the only one that can be followed in going from the interior to the seashore. A little in advance of the two hills, whose summit is covered with dense wood and scrub, extend marshes, which are the more dangerous, because their surface is perfidiously covered with close green grass, which completely conceals from the traveler the terrible danger to which he is exposed. The Cerro Pardo, which is much higher than the other hill, not only commands the latter, but also the surrounding country, as well as the sea.

After what we have said, the reader will easily perceive that the enterprise attempted by the Texans was only possible in the event of the coast being entirely undefended; but the inconceivable obstinacy of the commander-in-chief was the more incomprehensible, because he was not only thoroughly acquainted with the country, but at the moment when the army was about to begin its forward movements, several spies came, bringing news which entirely coincided with the positive reports already made by John Davis.

Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first build. This wise and thoughtful man, who had ever acted with extreme prudence, and whose conceptions up to this day had been remarkable for their lucidity, was deaf to all remonstrances, and the order was given to march. The army at once set out; Don Felix Paz went on ahead with his guerrillas, while the Jaguar's cuadrilla, on the contrary, remained in the rear. Tranquil, in spite of the wounds he had received, would not remain in the fort; he came along lying in a cart, having at his side Carmela and Quoniam, who paid him the utmost attention; while Lanzl, at the head of a dozen picked freebooters given him by the Jaguar, escorted the cart, in the event of the army being disturbed during the march.

The Jaguar was sorrowful, a gloomy presentiment seemed to warn him of a misfortune. This daring man, who carried out as if in sport the maddest and most venturesome deeds, now advanced reluctantly hesitating and constantly looking about him suspiciously. He feared no personal danger. Peril was his element; the heated atmosphere of battle, the odor of powder intoxicated him, and made him feel strange delight, but at this moment Carmela was near him; Carmela, whom he had so miraculously found and whom he feared to lose again. This strong man felt his heart soften at the thought, hence he insisted on taking the rear guard, in order to watch more closely over the maiden, and be in a position to help her if necessary.

The superior commander had not dared to refuse the bold partizan this post, which he asked for as a favor. This condescension on the part of the chief

had terrible consequences, and was partly the cause of the events that happened a few hours later.

The Texan troops, in spite of the various elements of which they were composed, advanced with an order and discipline that would have done honor to regulars. Don Felix Paz had thrown out flankers ordered to investigate the chaparral, and guarantee the safety of the route; but in spite of these precautions, whether the Mexicans were really ambushed in inaccessible places, or for some other reason, the flankers did not discover them, and the vanguard advanced at a pace which lightened the security of the main body, and gradually induced the chiefs to relax their previous watchfulness.

The vanguard reached the cross, and nothing had as yet happened to check the march of the army. Don Felix, after allowing his cuadrilla to halt for twenty minutes, resolutely entered the road that led to the spot where the Mexicans had landed. From the cross to the Rio Trinidad was no great distance, and could be covered in less than two hours by troops marching at the ordinary pace. The road, however, after passing the cross, becomes narrower, and soon changes into a very confined track, in which three persons can scarce walk abreast.

After crossing without obstacle the defile of the Cerro Pardo, instead of advancing in the direction of the river, on the bank of which the stranded boats could already be seen, Don Felix ordered his cuadrilla to wheel at about two hundred yards from the defile, and formed a front of fifty horses by ten deep. After commanding a halt, he dug his spurs in and returned to the gorge, but on this occasion alone.

While galloping, the partisan looked searchingly around him. As far as the eye could see the road was entirely deserted. Don Felix halted and bent over his horse's neck, as if wishing to arrange some buckle, but while patting his noble animal he twice repeated the croak of a rook. At once the harsh cry of the puffin rose from the bushes that bordered the right hand side of the road; the branches were then parted—a man appeared—it was Colonel Melendez. Don Felix did not appear at all surprised at seeing him; on the contrary, he advanced hurriedly toward him.

"Return to your ambush, colonel," he said. "If I am seen alone on the road my presence will arouse no suspicions; but you, *Cuerpo de Cristo!* you must not be seen. We can converse equally well at a distance, as the ears are able to overhear us are those of friends."

"You are always prudent, Don Felix."

"If not at all; I merely wish to avenge myself on those bandits who have plundered so many magnificent haciendas, and hatred renders a man prudent."

"Whatever be the motive that impels you, it gives you good inspirations; that is the main point. But let us return to our business: what do you want with me?"

"Merely to know two things."

"What are they?"

"Whether General Rubio is really satisfied with the plan I submitted to him?"

"You have proof of it before you; if he were not so, should I be here?"

"That is true."

"Now for the second."

"It is very serious, Don Juan. I wish, before the battle, to know if you have retained toward me that esteem and friendship with which you deigned to honor me at the Larch-tree hacienda?"

The colonel turned away in embarrassment.

"Why ask that question at this moment?" he remarked.

Don Felix turned pale and fixed a flashing glance upon him.

"Answer me, I implore you, Don Juan," he said, pressing. "Whatever you may think, whatever opinion you may have of me, I wish to know it; it must be so."

"Well, be it so; since you insist, I will explain my views, Don Felix. Yes, I blame but do not condemn you, for I cannot and will not be your judge. Don Felix, I am convinced that the man who makes himself, no matter the motive that impels him, the agent of treachery, commits worse than a crime, for he is guilty of an act of cowardice! Such a man I can pity, but no longer esteem."

The ex-mayor-domo listened to these harsh words with a forehead dripping with perspiration, but with head erect and eye sparkling with a gloomy fire. When the officer stopped he bowed coldly and took the hand which Don Juan did not attempt to draw from his grasp.

"It is well," he said; "your words are rude, but they are true. I thank you for your frankness, Don Juan; I know now what remains for me to do."

The colonel, who had involuntarily allowed his feelings of the moment to carry him away, fancied that he had gone too far, and was alarmed at the consequences of his imprudence.

"Don Felix," he added, "forgive me; I spoke to you like a madman."

"Come, come, Don Juan," he replied, with a bitter smile, "do not attempt to recall your words, you were but the echo of my conscience; what you have said aloud my heart has often whispered to me. Fear not that I shall let myself be overcome by a passing feeling of passion. No! I am one of those men who, when they have once entered a path, persevere in it at all hazards. But enough of this; I notice a dust, which probably announces our friends," he added, with a poignant irony. "Farewell, Don Juan, farewell."

And, not waiting for the answer Don Juan was preparing to give him, Don Felix spurred his horse, turned hastily round and went off as rapidly as he had come. The colonel looked after him for a moment thoughtfully.

"Alas!" he muttered, "that man is now more unhappy than culpable, or I am greatly mistaken; if he be not killed to-day it will not be for want of seeking death."

He then buried himself again in the chaparral with a melancholy shake of his head. In the mean while, the Texan army rapidly advanced; like the Mexicans, each mounted man had a foot soldier behind him. At about a gun-shot from the cross-roads the Texans came upon the edge of the trembling prairie; they were consequently obliged to halt in order to call in their flankers, scattered on the right and left, which produced a momentary disorder.

The order of march was necessarily altered, the

path grew narrower at every step, and the cavalry were unable to keep their ranks any longer. From the moment of the start, the vanguard had not announced any danger. The army, trusting in the experience of the officer detached to clear the way, marched in perfect security, which was augmented by the hope of speedily reaching the mouth of the Rio Trinidad, and at once embarking for Galveston.

The Jaguar alone did not share the general confidence; the ground he now trod seemed to him so suitable in every way for a surprise, that he could not persuade himself that they would reach the seashore without an attack. In a word, the young chief had an intuition of approaching danger. He guessed it, felt it, so to speak, though he could not tell from what quarter it would come.

The Jaguar resolved, whatever the consequences might be, to avoid personally a surprise, whose results would be disastrous to those he had vowed to protect and defend, that is to say, to Tranquil and Carmela. Gradually slackening the pace of his detachment, he succeeded in leaving a sufficiently wide distance between himself and the main body, to regain almost entirely his liberty of action. His first care was to collect round the cart the men in whom he placed the most confidence. Then selecting those of his comrades whom he supposed most conversant with Indian tricks, he placed them under the command of John Davis, with orders to force their way, as well as they could, through the chaparral that skirted both sides of the track, and inclosed it so completely, that it was impossible to see anything beyond.

John Davis spread out his men as a forlorn hope, on either side the road. The Jaguar proceeded to the cart after this, and addressed the hunter.

"Well, Tranquil," he said to him, "how do you find yourself?"

"Better," the other answered; "I hope within a few days to be sufficiently recovered to give up this wearisome position."

"And your strength?"

"Is rapidly returning."

"All the better. Would you be capable of firing in your own defense, without leaving the cart?"

"I think so. But do you fear any trap? the spot where we now are, appears most favorable for it."

"Does it not? Well, you have spoken the truth, I fear an ambushade. Here is a rifle, and if needs must, make use of it."

"Trust to me. Thanks," he added, as he clutched the weapon with a delight he did not attempt to conceal.

The Jaguar then placed himself at the head of his troop, and gave orders to set out again. Long before this, the main body of the army had passed the cross, the heads of the columns were already entering the defile, a movement which, owing to the narrowness, produced some disorder the leaders were trying to repress, when suddenly a shower of canister burst from the Cerro Pardo, and made wide gaps in the crowded ranks of the Texans. At the same instant a terrible shout was heard from the other end of the canon, and Don Felix Paz's cuadrilla appeared galloping at full speed toward the main body.

At the first moment the Texans had to make way for these horsemen, whom they supposed to be closely pursued by a still invisible enemy; but their surprise changed into terror and stupor when they saw this vanguard dash at them and mercilessly saber them with shouts of "*Mejico! Mejico! Federación!*"

The Texans were betrayed! Suffering from a terror that almost bordered on madness, unable to form in this limited spot, decimated by the canister incessantly discharged at them, and sabered by Don Felix's cuadrilla, they had but one thought—that of flight. But at the moment when they tried to turn, the terrible cry of "*Mejico! Mejico! mueran los rebeldes!*" resounded like a funeral knell in their rear, and Colonel Melendez, at the head of his five hundred horses, dashed at the Texans, who were thus caught between two fires.

The medley then assumed the fearful proportions of one of those mediaeval butcheries in which man, having attained the paroxysm of fury, intoxicated by the sharp smell of powder, smoke, and the din of battle, kills for the sake of killing with the pleasure of a wild beast, growing excited by the massacre of every victim that falls, and far from satiating his hatred, finds it increase in proportion to the corpses piled up on the blood-stained ground.

Flight was impossible, and resistance seemed the same. At this supreme hour, when all appeared lost, an irresistible movement suddenly took place in the terrified crowd, which opened like a ripe fruit through the bloody track thus made by main force. The Jaguar now dashed forward, brandishing his machete above his head, and followed by his brave cuadrilla. A cry of delight saluted the arrival of the daring freebooter, who had been obliged to cut his way through Colonel Melendez's Mexicans, as they vainly strove to stop his passage.

"My lad!" the Jaguar shouted, in a voice that rose above the din of battle, "we are surrounded by the enemy, and have been betrayed and led into a trap by a coward. Let us show these Mexicans, what men like ourselves are capable of. Follow me—forward! forward!"

"Forward!" the Texans vociferated, electrified by these daring words.

The Jaguar made his horse bound, and dashed at the side of the mountain. His military instinct had not deserted him, for that was, in fact, the key of the battle. The Texans rushed after him, brandishing their weapons and uttering yells of fury. But at this moment the troops of General Rubio made their appearance, who had hitherto remained ambushed behind the trees and bushes; they crowned the heights, lined the sides of the road, and the fight began again more terrible and obstinate than before. The efforts were useless; the Texans returned eight times to the assault of the Cerro Pardo, and eight times were driven back in disorder to the foot of the mountain, which they were unable to scale.

In vain did the Jaguar, Davis, Fray Antonio, El Alferéz, and the other chiefs perform deeds of valor; the Mexican bullets decimated their soldiers, who at length growing discouraged, refused any longer to continue an impossible contest. The commander-in-chief of the army, who by his imprudence had caused this grave disaster, resolved to make a final and supreme effort. Collecting all the

men who still attempted resistance, he formed them into a column of attack, and dashed like a whirlwind at the Mexican guns, the artillerymen of which were cut down without yielding an inch. Surprised by this sudden and furious charge, the Mexicans broke and abandoned the battery. Already the Texans, who were almost masters of the plateau, were preparing to take advantage of this unhopedor success; but unfortunately, the revolutionary army, nearly entirely demoralized, did not support with vigor the heroic effort of these few chosen braves; the Mexicans had time to recover from their surprise and compare their strength with that of their foes. Ashamed at the check they had suffered, they rushed upon the enemy, and after a frightful hand-to-hand fight, they succeeded in driving the Texans from the plateau.

Colonel Melendez and Don Felix Paz had at length effected their junction; the Texans had not even the possibility of flight left them, but the Jaguar did not yet despair; still, since he could no longer conquer, he would at least save Carmela. But between her and him stood a human wall, through which he must clear a road. The young man did not hesitate; turning like a wounded lion, he bounded into the midst of the enemy's ranks, summoning his comrades, and waving round his head the terrible machete he had employed so well during the action. A man boldly rushed to meet him with uplifted saber.

"Ah! the traitor Don Felix!" the Jaguar shouted, on recognizing him, and split his skull open.

Then he rushed like an avalanche down the mountain side, overthrowing every one he came across; and followed by a few of his most devoted companions, the ranks of the Mexicans opened to let them pass.

"Thanks, brother," the Jaguar shouted with considerable emotion to Colonel Melendez, who had given his soldiers a sign to let him pass.

The colonel turned away and made no answer. The carnage was soon over. Six hundred Texans fell into the hands of the victors, while eight hundred found death on the field of battle.

That same evening General Rubio re-entered Galveston at the head of his victorious army; the insurrectionists fled in terror in all directions, without hope of ever again collecting. The cause of Texan liberty seemed lost for a long time, if not forever.

The Jaguar, on reaching the cross-roads, found the cart smashed, and most of its defenders lying dead on the ground. Singular to say, they had all been scalped. Tranquil, Quoniam, Carmela, and Lanzi had disappeared. What terrible drama could have been performed at this spot?"

CHAPTER VII. THE ATEPETL.

TEXAS is intersected by two lines of continuous forests, which run from the north, near the sources of the Rio Trinidad to the Arkansas river. These forests are called the "Cross Timbers;" behind them commence the immense prairies of Apacheria, on which countless herds of buffaloes and wild horses wander about at liberty.

In the center of a narrow valley, on the banks of the Rio Sabina, a little above its confluence with the Vermejo, an Indian village was deliciously scattered among the trees. The latter formed a dense dome of foliage over the callis, which they sheltered from the hot beams of the southern sun, and protected from the cold gusts which at times descend from the mountains in the winter season. This village was a winter atepetl of the Comanche Indians, belonging to the Antelope tribe. We will describe in a few words this village, where several important scenes connected with our narrative will take place.

Although built to the fancy of the red-skins, the callis affected a certain regularity of construction, as they all converged on a common point, which formed a grand square in the heart of the village. In the center of this square could be seen a large unhooped barrel, deeply buried in the ground, and covered with lichens and stone-crop. It was the "ark of the first man." It was here that the war stake was planted before the great medicine lodge; and here, under grave circumstances, the sachems lit the council fire, and smoked the sacred calumet ordinarily placed before the entrance of the calli of the chief sachem, and supported on two forked sticks, as it must never touch the ground.

The Indian callis are generally constructed in a spherical shape, built on piles covered with mud, over which buffalo hides sewn together, and displaying numerous pictures of animals painted in vermilion, are thrown. On a scaffolding standing in front of the calli, Indian corn, forage for the horses, and the winter provisions of each inhabitant were stored. At intervals could be seen tall poles, from which waved, at the slightest breath of air, blankets, harness, and fragments of stuffs of every description, the homage raised by the superstitious redskins to the Master of Life.

The village, excepting on the side turned to the Sabina river, was surrounded by a strong palisade about fifteen feet high, made of enormous trunks of trees, fastened together with strips of bark and wooden cramp-hooks. At about five or six hundred yards from the atepetl was the cemetery, the exhalations from which, by disagreeably affecting a traveler's sense of smell, advised him that he was approaching an Indian tribe.

Two months after the battle of Cerro Pardo, on the day when we resume our narrative, and about an hour before sunset on a fine September afternoon, several riders, mounted on fiery mustangs, were following, while conversing together rather eagerly, a path which runs for several leagues along the course of the Rio Sabina and terminates at the winter atepetl of the Antelope Comanches, which we described at the beginning of this chapter.

These horsemen, five in number, were armed with rifles, tomahawks and machetes. They wore the cotton hunting-shirt of the wood-rangers fastened round the waist, *mitasses*, or trousers, in two pieces, tied at the ankles, fur caps and Indian moccasins. Although this costume was almost identical with that worn by the majority of the Indian tribes, it was easy to recognize these riders as white men, not only through the ease of their manners, but also through the clearness of their complexion.

About two hundred yards behind the horsemen came a sixth, mounted and dressed like them, but who was apparently a red-skin. His head, instead

of being covered by a fur cap, was bare; his hair, pulled up at the top of his head and stained with red ochre, was fastened with strips of snake-skin; a falcon feather stuck in above his right ear, near his war scalp-lock, indicated his claim to high rank among his countrymen, while the numerous wolf-tails fastened to his heels proved that he was a renowned warrior; in his right hand he held a fan made of the entire wing of an eagle, and in his left he waved the short-handled and long-lashed whip peculiar to the Comanche and Sioux Indians.

These riders employed none of the precautions usual on the prairie to avoid surprises, or foil the enemies generally ambushed in the track of hunters.

From the way in which they conversed together, and the absent glances they at times took across the country, it might easily be guessed that they were reaching a spot well known to them, and where they felt certain of not being entrapped. Still, had they not been absorbed in their conversation, and could their glances have pierced the dense curtain of verdure that formed a fragrant wall on their right, they would have seen amid the shrubs and lower branches of the trees an agitation not at all natural, and doubtless produced by the passage of a wild beast; at times, too, they might have noticed two eyes flashing among the leaves, which were fixed upon them with a savage expression of passion and hatred.

On coming within pistol-shot of the village, the horsemen stopped to give the Indian behind them time to rejoin them. So soon as the latter perceived this halt, he whipped his horse, and almost immediately ranged up alongside his comrades. He stopped his horse, and waited silently and calmly until he should be addressed.

"What are we to do now, chief?" one of the travelers asked. "So soon as we have passed that projecting point we shall be in the valley."

"Our pale brothers are brave; the Antelope Comanches will be happy to receive them and burn powder in their honor. A chief will go alone to the village to announce their arrival to the sachems."

"Go then, chief; we will await you here."

"Wah! my brother has spoken well."

The Indian vigorously lashed his horse, which bounded ahead and speedily disappeared behind the peak to which the hunter had pointed. The horsemen drew up in line and waited motionless with their hands on their weapons. In a very few minutes a noise was heard resembling the rolling of thunder, and suddenly a crowd of mounted Indians appeared, coming at full speed, brandishing their weapons, discharging their guns, howling and whistling in the long *iskokettas* made of human thigh-bones, which they were hanging from their necks.

On their side, the hunters, at a sign from the man who appeared to be their leader, made their horses curvet, and discharged their weapons with repeated shouts and demonstrations of joy. For half an hour there was a deafening noise, augmented by the yells of the squaws and children who flocked up, blowing shells and rattling *chichikous*, and the barking of the thousands of the savage and half-tamed dogs which the Indians constantly take about with them. It was plain that the strangers to whom the red-skins, generally so haughty and retiring, offered so warm and friendly a reception, were great friends of the tribe; for, had it been otherwise, a deputation of chiefs would have met them at the entrance of the village to do them the honors of the atepetl, but the brave and renowned warriors would not have thought it necessary to get under arms.

All at once the noise ceased as if by enchantment, and the Indian horsemen ranged themselves in a semicircle in front of the white hunters. A few paces before the line, four principal chiefs, mounted on magnificent mustangs, formed a separate group. These warriors, completely armed and painted for war, wore the great cap of feathers which only renowned warriors who have raised many scalps are entitled to assume; their shoulders were decked with superb necklaces of grizzly bears' claws, five inches long and white at the tips; behind them floated the white buffalo robe, painted red inside, and on which their exploits were designed; in one hand they held their guns, in the other a fan made of the wing of a white-headed eagle. These warriors had something majestic and imposing about them that inspired respect.

For some ten minutes the Indians and hunters stood thus, motionless and silent, in presence of each other, when suddenly a fresh horseman appeared, coming at full speed from the village. He was evidently a white man; he was dressed in the garb of a wood-ranger, and two magnificent *rasteros*, or gray-hounds, leaped up playfully on either side of his horse. At the appearance of the new comer the Indians burst into yells of joy, and shouted—

"The great brave of the Antelope Comanches! Loyal Heart, Loyal Heart!"

The warrior was really the Mexican hunter, who has already made his appearance several times during the course of our narrative. He saluted the warriors by a wave of the hand, and took his place among the chiefs, who respectfully made way for him.

"My brother Black-deer has informed me of the arrival of great friends of our nation," he said, "and I have hurried up in all haste to witness their reception and bid them welcome."

"Why has not the Black-deer accompanied our brother the great brave of the tribe?" one of the chiefs asked.

"The sachem wished to remain in the village and watch the preparation of the medicine lodge."

The chief bowed, but said nothing further. Loyal Heart then put his horse at a gallop and advanced toward the hunters, who, on their sides, made a move to meet him.

"You are welcome here, Tranquil," Loyal Heart said; "yourself and your comrades were impatiently expected."

"Thank you," Tranquil answered, pressing the hand the hunter offered him; "many events have happened since our separation, and it certainly did not depend on us that we did not arrive sooner."

The five white hunters were all old acquaintances—Tranquil, Lani, Quoniam, John Davis and Fray Antonio. Loyal Heart took Tranquil's right hand, and both advanced at an amble toward the chiefs.

"Sachems of the Antelope tribe," he said, "this pale hunter is my brother; his heart is good, his arm strong, and his tongue is not forked; he loves the red-

men; he is renowned as a great brave in his nation; he is wise at the council fire; love him, for the Master of Life sustains him and has removed the skin from his heart, in order that his blood may be pure and the words he utters such as a wise warrior ought to pronounce."

"Wah!" one of the sachems answered, with a graceful bow to the hunter; "the Comanches are great warriors; who can tell the extent of the hunting grounds the Great Spirit has given them? They are the masters of the red-man because they are all great braves, whose heels are adorned with numerous wolf-tails. My pale brother and his warriors will enter the atepetl; they will receive calls, horses, and squaws to clean their arms and prepare their food, and the tribe of Antelope Comanches will count five braves more. I have spoken; have I said right, chiefs?"

"Chief," Tranquil replied, "I thank you for the hearty reception you are pleased to offer me. My brother, Loyal Heart, has told you the truth about my feelings toward your nation. I love the red-men, and especially the Comanches, who, of all the nations dwelling on the prairies, are the noblest and most courageous, and rightly call themselves the Queen Nation of the prairies, because their war-horses and braves traverse it in all directions, and no one dares to oppose them. In my own name and that of my comrades I accept your frank and cordial hospitality."

The principal sachem then took off his buffalo-robe, with a gesture full of dignity, and placed it on the shoulders of the hunter, while the other chiefs did the same to his comrades.

"Warriors and braves of the powerful Antelope tribe," he said, turning to the Indians, who were still motionless and silent, "these pale-faces are henceforth our brothers. Woe to the man that insults them!"

At these words the shouts and yells recommenced with fresh vigor, and the Indians displayed signs of the liveliest joy. Possibly this joy was not so real as it appeared, and was not equally shared by all present. But those that might be annoyed at the admission of the wood-rangers into the tribe, carefully concealed their displeasure, and were, perhaps, the very men whose demonstrations of delight were the most vociferous.

After this final ceremony, the Indian sachems took the white hunters in their midst, and placing themselves at the head of their warriors, started at a gallop for the village. At the entrance Black-deer was waiting for them, surrounded by the most important and wisest sachems of the tribe. Without uttering a syllable, he took the head of the column and led it to the center of the village, near the Ark of the first man. On reaching it the Indians suddenly halted, as if the feet of their horses were imbedded in the ground. Black-deer then stationed himself at the doorway of the medicine-lodge, between the hachesto, who held in his hand the totem of the tribe, and the pipe-bearer, who supported the sacred calumet.

"Who are the pale men who thus enter as friends the atepetl of the Antelope Comanches?" he asked, addressing Loyal Heart.

"They are brothers, who ask leave to sit by the hearth of the red-men," the latter answered.

"It is well, Black-deer continued; 'these men are our brothers. The council-fire is lighted; they will enter with us the lodge of the Great Medicine, sit down by the fire and smoke *moriches* from the sacred calumet with the sachems of the nation.'

"Let it be as my brother has decided," Loyal Heart responded.

Black-deer gave a wave of the hand, upon which the hachesto raised the curtained door of the lodge, and the chiefs entered, followed by the hunters. The medicine-lodge, much larger than the other callis of the village was also built with great care. The buffalo skins that covered it were painted red with a profusion of black designs, a species of sacred hieroglyphics, only understood by the medicine-men and the most renowned sachems of the tribe. The interior of the lodge was empty. In the center was a round hole dug in the earth to the depth of about two feet; in this hole the requisite wood and charcoal were prepared.

When all the chiefs had entered the lodge, the hachesto let the curtain fall again that formed the entrance. A band of picked warriors immediately surrounded the lodge to keep off the curious, and insure the secrecy of the deliberations. The Indians are excessively strict about the laws of etiquette; with them everything is regulated with a minuteness we should be far from expecting among a semi-barbarous nation; and each is bound by the severest penalties to conform.

Black-deer was well aware who the pale-faces were that had reached the village, since he had acted as their guide. But etiquette demanded that he should receive them as he had done, for otherwise the other chiefs might have been scandalized by such a breach of custom, and the strangers would, in all probability, have fallen victims to their forgetfulness of the usages of the nation.

The chiefs crouched silently in the center of the lodge. The hachesto then presented Black-deer with a medicine rod to the end of which was attached a piece of lighted ocote wood. The sachem kindled the fire. The pipe-bearer then entered the lodge, bearing on his shoulder the sacred calumet.

The sacred calumet is a pipe whose stem, ordinarily of maple, varies from nine to eleven feet in length. This stick is profusely garnished with feathers, glass bells and rattles. The bowl is made of red stone, found in a district of the Rocky Mountains, where the Indians go to extract it.

The Indian sachems only use the sacred calumet on solemn occasions, such as receptions, declarations of war, or the election of a chief. The tobacco they burn in the calumet is called *morichee*; it is a narcotic plant, bearing a distant resemblance to tobacco. It is washed before using, and then steeped in spirits, after which it is dried and mixed with ordinary tobacco. This manipulation is effected by the medicine-men, or sorcerers, who alone have the right of steeping the *morichee*, though they are not allowed to convert it to their private use.

At a sign from Black-deer the pipe-bearer lit the calumet with a medicine-rod; he then presented the end of the tube to the chief, while holding the bowl in the palm of his right hand. Black-deer inhaled the smoke twice, and then blew it out in the direc-

tion of the four cardinal points, saying, "Master of Life! powerful Wacondah! may the smell of the *morichee* delight thy nostrils! regard us with a favorable eye, as thy well-beloved children! As I breathe this smoke toward thee, blow into our bosoms the wisdom that ought to preside at our councils!"

After pronouncing these words, Black-deer inhaled the smoke twice, and then passed the tube to the next chief. The latter silently puffed forth the smoke, and passed the pipe on to his neighbor. The calumet thus went the round of the company, and returned to Black-deer, who smoked it out. When all the tobacco was consumed, the pipe-bearer emptied the burning ash into the council fire, saying:

"The Master of Life has received the offering of the Comanche sachems. All the rites are accomplished, the council is opened."

After speaking thus, the pipe-bearer withdrew, and the chiefs remained alone. The council had two very serious questions to discuss. In the first place, it was proposed to organize a great expedition against the Buffalo Apaches, a plundering tribe, who had several times stolen horses from the very villages of the Comanches, and on whom the sachems desired to take exemplary revenge. Secondly, Tranquil, through the medium of Loyal Heart, whose influence was great with the tribe, requested that a band of picked braves, amounting to fifty, and placed under the command of Loyal Heart, should be intrusted to him for an expedition, the object of which he could not divulge at the moment, but its success would benefit his allies as much as himself.

The first question was, after several speeches, unanimously resolved in the affirmative. The council was proceeding to discuss the second, when a loud noise was heard outside, the curtain of the medicine lodge was raised, and the hachesto walked in. The hachesto is a man who must be gifted with a loud and powerful voice. He represents among the red-skins the town-crier, and his duty is to make news public, and convene the chiefs to council. When he made his appearance in the lodge, Black-deer gave him an angry glance.

"When the chiefs are assembled in the medicine-lodge, they must not be disturbed," he said to him. "My father, Wah-Rush-a-Menec, speaks well," the Indian answered with a respectful bow; "his son knows it."

"Then, why has my son entered without the orders of the sachems?"

"Because five warriors of the Buffalo Apaches have arrived at the village."

"Wah! and who is the brave that has made them prisoners? why has he not taken their scalps? does he prefer fastening them to the stake of torture?"

The hachesto shook his head.

"These warriors have not been made prisoners by any of our braves, they are free. They call themselves ambassadors."

"Ambassadors! And who is the chief that marches at their head?"

"Blue-fox."

"Blue-fox is a great brave. He is a terrible warrior in fight; his arm has raised many scalps belonging to my sons; he has robbed them of many horses. But his presence is disagreeable to the Comanches. What does he want?"

"To enter the medicine-lodge, and explain to the sachems the mission with which he is intrusted."

"It is well," said Black-deer giving an inquiring glance to the members of the council.

The latter replied by a nod of assent. Loyal Heart rose—

"My pale brothers, I must not be present at the deliberation that is about to take place," he remarked; "will the chief permit me to retire?"

"Loyal Heart is a son of the Comanches," Black-deer answered; "his place is among us, for, if he be young in years, his experience and wisdom are great. But he can do as he pleases—the pale hunters can retire. If the chiefs require Loyal Heart, they will request his return."

The young man bowed ceremoniously, and withdrew, followed by the hunters, who, we must confess, were delighted at getting away from the medicine-lodge, for they felt the need of rest after the fatigue they had undergone in making a long journey.

CHAPTER VIII. HOSPITALITY.

ON quitting the medicine-lodge, Loyal Heart led the travelers to two callis communicating with each other; then, making Tranquil a sign to follow him, he left the four hunters to make themselves as comfortable as they could.

"As for you, my friend," he said to Tigrero, "I hope you will accept the hospitality my modest abode permits me to offer you."

"Why put yourself to trouble for me?" the Canadian replied, "the slightest thing suffices me. I assure you that I should be all right with my comrades."

"I do not put myself out at all; on the contrary, I feel a real pleasure in giving you a place at my fireside."

"As it is so, I no longer insist; do what you please with me."

"Thanks! come on then."

Without further remark, they crossed the village square, which was almost deserted at this moment, for night had fallen some time previously, and most of the Indians had retired to their wigwams.

Loyal Heart, after walking for some minutes, stopped before a calli of sufficiently singular appearance to surprise Tranquil, although he was not easily astonished. This calli, which anywhere else would have been quite commonplace, justly appeared strange in an Indian village. It was a rather large rancho, built in the Mexican fashion, of planks painted. The roof was flat, and in front of the door was a porch formed of six enormous trees fastened together, and covered with an azotea. On either side the door were three windows with glass panes, a most singular thing at a spot so remote from civilization.

A man of about fifty years of age, tall and thin, and dressed in a Mexican garb, was smoking a cigarette as he sat on an equal in the porch. This man whose hair was turning gray, had the most though resolute look of a man who had suffered

greatly. On seeing him, the *rastreros*, which hitherto had not left Loyal a yard, rushed toward him with a joyous bark, and leaped up at him caressingly.

"Ah," the man said, as he rose and bowed respectfully to the hunter, "it is you, *mi amo*! you return home very late."

These words were uttered in that affectionate tone which is so pleasing in the mouth of an old and faithful servant.

"That is true, No Eusebio," the young man answered with a smile, as he squeezed the hand of the old man. "I bring a friend."

"He is welcome," No Eusebio answered.

"Come in, my friend," said Loyal Heart; "I should not like to keep my mother waiting any longer."

"Announce us; No Eusebio, we follow you."

The servant turned to obey, but the *rastreros* had long ago announced the hunter's return to his mother, by rushing madly into the house, hence the lady appeared in the doorway at the moment when the three men prepared to enter.

"Caballero," she said, in a gentle and melodious voice, as she smiled on the Canadian, "enter this modest abode, where you have been impatiently expected for a long time. Although our hearth be small, we always keep a nook for a friend."

"Senora," the hunter replied, with a bow, "your reception overcomes me with joy. I trust I shall prove deserving of the kindness you show me."

They entered the rancho, whose interior corresponded exactly with the exterior. A candle, suspended from a beam, illuminated a large room, the furniture of which consisted merely of a few equipals, two butacas, and a chiffonier, all clumsily made with the hatchet. On the whitewashed walls hung four of those colored engravings with which Parisian commerce inundates both hemispheres.

By the care of Dona Garillas and No Eusebio a frugal meal was prepared, of which the travelers partook heartily.

When the meal was ended the three men rose from the table and seated themselves around a copper *brasero* full of hot ashes, and began smoking. The dogs, like vigilant sentries, had lain down across the door with outstretched heads and pricked-up ears.

The greatest silence prevailed in the village; the songs and laughter had gradually died out; the Indians were asleep or appeared to be so. Dona Garillas had made a bed of furs in one corner of the room, and was about to invite the hunter to rest his weary limbs, when the dogs raised their heads sharply and began growling; at the same instant two slight taps were given on the door of the rancho.

"Tis a friend," Loyal Heart said; "open, no Eusebio."

The old servant obeyed, and an Indian stalked in; it was Black-deer. The chief's face was gloomy; he bowed slightly to the company, and, without saying a syllable, sat down near the *brasero*. The hunters were too conversant with the Indian character to question the chief, so long as he was pleased to keep silence. Tranquil, however, drew his pipe from his lips and handed it to Black-deer, who began smoking, after thanking him with one of those emphatic gestures usual with the red-skins. There was a long silence, but at last the chief raised his head.

"The chiefs have left the council-lodge," he said. "No determination was formed, no answer given the envoy."

"The sachems are prudent, they wished to reflect," Loyal Heart replied.

The sachem nodded.

"Does my brother Loyal Heart wish to learn what happened at the council after his departure?" he asked.

"My brother is thoughtful, his heart is sad; let him speak, the ears of a friend are open."

"The chief will eat first," Dona Garillas remarked, "he remained late at the council; the squaws have not prepared his evening meal."

"My mother is good," he replied, with a smile, "Black-deer will eat; he is here in the wigwam of the brother of his heart; the warriors have exchanged horses and weapons."

Who taught the Indians this custom, which makes them select a friend, with whom they exchange arms and horses, and who, from that moment, is dearer to them than if blood-ties attached them? Black-deer and Loyal Heart had really made the exchange referred to by the sachem.

"My mother will retire to sleep," said Loyal Heart. "I will wait on my brother."

"Be it so," the red-skin answered; "my mother needs rest—the night is advanced."

Dona Garillas understood that the three men had to talk about secret affairs, so, after bidding her guests good-night, she withdrew. As for Eusebio, considering his presence unnecessary, he went to bed after the Indian's arrival, that is to say, lay down on a hammock, suspended in the porch of the house, with the two *rastreros* at his feet, so that no one could enter or leave the house without awakening him. After hurriedly eating a few mouthfuls, Black-deer spoke again.

"My brother Loyal Heart is young," he said, but his wisdom is great; the chiefs have confidence in him, and would not decide anything till they had heard his opinion."

"My brothers know that I am devoted to them. If my brother will explain, I will answer him."

Blue-fox arrived at the village to-day; he came on the part of the chiefs of his nation; Blue-fox has put on the skin of the timid *ashatas*; his words are gentle and his mouth distills honey; but the buffalo cannot leap like the elk, or the hawk imitate the dove. The chiefs did not put faith in his words."

"Then they answered him in the negative?"

"No; they wished first to consult my brother."

"Wah! on what subject?"

"My brother will listen. The pale-faces on the other side of the *Meche-chebe* dug up the war hatchet against each other some moons ago, as my brother knows."

"I know it, chief, and so do you. But how does it concern us? a quarrel among the whites cannot affect us in any way, so long as they do not invade our domain."

"My brother speaks like a wise man; the sachems are of the same opinion."

"Good; I cannot understand, then, why the chiefs discussed such a subject."

"Wah! my brother can speedily understand if he will listen."

"Chief, you red-skins have an unlucky knack of wrapping up your thoughts in so many words that it is impossible to guess the point you are aiming at."

Black-deer broke into that silent laugh peculiar to Indians.

"My brother knows how to discover a trail better than any one," he said.

"Certainly; but to do so I must be shown a foot-step or trace, however feeble it may be."

"And my brother has discovered the trail, which I merely indicated to him?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I should be curious to know my brother's thoughts."

"Then listen to me in your turn, Black-deer—I shall be brief. Blue-fox was sent by the Buffalo Apaches to the Antelope Comanches to propose to them an offensive and defensive alliance against one of the two nations of the pale-faces which have dug up the hatchet against each other."

In spite of all the indifference which nature and Indian training had endowed him with, the chief could not conceal the amazement he experienced on hearing these words.

"It is well," he said; "my brother is not only a great brave and daring warrior, but is also a man inspired by the *Wacondah*. His medicine is irresistible, he knows everything. Blue-fox made this proposition to the sachems."

"And have they accepted it?"

"No; I repeat to my brother that they would not give any answer till they heard his opinion."

"Very good, then. This is my opinion, and the chiefs can follow it or not, as they please: The Comanche nation is the Queen of the Prairies; the most invincible warriors assemble beneath its totem; its hunting-ground extends over the whole earth; the Comanches alone are indomitable. Why should they ally themselves with the Apache thieves? Why should they league with their most obstinate enemies against men who are fighting to obtain their liberty? Blue-fox is a renegade from the Snake Pawnees; my brother knows him, since he is his personal enemy. Any peace proposed by such an ambassador must conceal a trap; sooner war than such an alliance."

There was a rather lengthened silence, during which the chief reflected deeply on what he had just heard.

"My brother is right," he said at last; "wisdom resides in him, his tongue is not forked, the words he utters are inspired by the *Wacondah*! The Comanches will not treat with the plundering Apaches. The council has asked for three suns to reflect on this grave question; in three suns Blue-fox will return with a refusal to those who sent him. The Comanches will dig up the war-hatchet sooner than ally themselves with their enemies."

"My brothers, if they do that, will act like wise men."

"They will do it. I have now to speak to my brother on a matter that interests me personally."

"Good. Sleep does not yet weigh down my eyelids, so I will listen to my brother."

"Loyal Heart is a friend of Blackbird," the chief continued, with some hesitation.

The hunter smiled knowingly.

"Blackbird is one of the most renowned braves of the tribe," he answered; "his daughter, Bounding Fawn, will count fourteen autumns at the fall of the leaves."

"Black-deer loves Bounding Fawn."

"I know it; my brother has already confessed to me that the virgin of the first love placed, during his sleep, a four-leaved shamrock under his head. But has the chief assured himself as to Bounding Fawn's feelings?"

"The young virgin smiles when the chief returns from an expedition with scalps hanging from his girdle; she trembles when he departs; she feeds his horse in secret, and her greatest pleasure is to clean his weapons. When the maidens of the tribe dance at night to the sound of the drum and *chichikoué*, Bounding Fawn gazes thoughtfully in the direction of Black-deer's call, and forgets to dance with her companions."

"Good! and does the maiden recognize the sound of my brother's war whistle, and run joyfully to the meeting the chief grants her? To-night, for instance, were the chief to call her, would she rise from her bed to obey his summons?"

"She would rise," the chief answered, laconically.

"Good! Now, what does the chief wish to ask of me? Blackbird is rich."

"Black-deer will give six mares which have never felt a bit, two guns, and four hides of the white she-buffalo; to-morrow the chief's mother will give them to my brother."

"Good. And does my brother intend to carry off the woman he loves this night?"

"Black-deer suffers from being so long separated from her; since the death of his well-beloved wife, Singing-bird, the chief's call is solitary. Bounding Fawn will prepare the venison for the chief; what does my brother think of it?"

"My horse is ready; if my brother say yes, I will accompany him, if it be that he desires, as I suppose."

"Loyal Heart knows everything; nothing escapes his discernment."

"Let us go without loss of time. Will you accompany us, Tranquil? two witnesses are required, as you are aware."

"I wish for nothing better, if my presence be not disagreeable to the chief."

"On the contrary; the pale hunter is a great brave. I shall be pleased to know that he is by my side."

The three men rose and quitted the house. No Eusebio raised his head.

"We shall return in an hour," Loyal Heart said, as he passed.

The old servant made no reply, and fell back in his hammock. The chief's horse was tied to a tree near the rancho; he leaped into the saddle and waited for the two hunters, who had gone to the corral to fetch their ponies. In a few minutes they arrived. The three men slowly traversed the village, whose streets were completely deserted at this late hour of the night. Like all the winter villages, this one was carefully guarded. Numerous sentries were placed at different points, who, recognizing the

three horsemen, allowed them to pass *espasmos* unnoticed.

After leaving the village, Black-deer, who rode in front, made a sharp turn to the right, and the horsemen almost immediately disappeared in a thick chaparral. The night was magnificent, the sky studded with a profusion of glistening stars; the moon shed a pale and soft light, which, owing to the purity of the atmosphere, allowed objects to be distinguished for a great distance.

Black-deer advanced to the edge of the covert, and, raising his fingers to his lips, imitated the cry of the raven thrice. A few minutes after the cry of the blue-jay was heard. Black-deer repeated his signal. This time the note of the sparrow-hawk was mingled with that of the jay. The Indian started, and looked in the direction where his friends were concealed.

"Is my brother ready?" he said.

"I am," Loyal Heart simply answered.

Almost immediately four riders could be seen leaving the village at a gallop, and advancing rapidly toward the spot where the chief stood motionless. The rider who galloped at the head of the band was a woman; she made her horse gallop in a straight line, clearing all the obstacles that were in its way. The three other riders were about a bow-shot behind her. This race had something fantastic about it in the night, amidst this grand scenery. Bounding Fawn, for it was she, fell fainting into Black-deer's arms.

"Here I am! here I am!" she cried in a joyous voice, choked, however, by emotion.

The Indian pressed her lovingly to his wide chest, and lifting her from the ground leaped onto his horse, dug his spurs, and started at full speed in the direction of the desert. At the same moment, the horsemen arrived, uttering yells of anger and brandishing their weapons; but they found before them the two hunters, who resolutely barred their passage.

"Stay, Blackbird!" Loyal Heart shouted; "your daughter belongs to my brother. Black-deer is a great chief, his call is lined with scalps—he is rich in horses, arms and furs; Bounding Fawn will be the *chiqui* of a great brave, whose medicine is powerful."

"Does Black-deer mean, then, to carry off my daughter?" Blackbird asked.

"He does mean it, and we his friends will defend him. Your daughter pleases him, and he will have her. In defiance of you, and all who may attempt to oppose it, he will take her as his wife."

"Wah!" the Indian said, turning to the horsemen who accompanied him, "my brothers have heard; what do they say?"

"We have heard," the red-skins answered; "we say that Black-deer is truly a great chief, and since he is powerful enough to seize the woman he loves in spite of her father and relatives, he ought to keep her."

"My brothers have spoken well," Loyal Heart remarked. "To-morrow I will come to Blackbird's call and pay him the purchase-money for the maiden the chief has robbed him of."

"Good! To-morrow I shall expect Loyal Heart and his friend, the other pale-face warrior," Blackbird said with a bow.

After these remarks the three Indian warriors returned to the village, closely followed by the two hunters. As for Black-deer, he had buried himself with his booty in the thickest part of the forest, where no one attempted to disturb him. The preliminaries of a Comanche marriage had been strictly carried out on both sides.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARRIAGE.

WHEN the two hunters returned to the ranch, Tranquil looked at Loyal Heart.

"Well," he said to him, "and what are you going to do?"

"Well," the other replied with a smile, "the same as you are going to do yourself, I suppose, sleep—for it is close on two o'clock." But noticing the Canadian's anxious air, he hurriedly added—"Pardon, I forgot that you have made a long journey to find me here, and that probably you have important matters to communicate to me. Well! if you do not feel too fatigued, I will rekindle the fire and listen to you; I do not feel sleepy."

Tranquil silently shook his head.

"I thank you for your kindness, my friend," he said; "but I prefer deferring the conversation till to-morrow. Let us sleep. After our visit to Blackbird, we will hold a palaver."

"Be it so, my friend, I will not press you; here is your bed," he added, pointing to the pile of furs.

"It is rare for me to have so good a one in the desert," said Tranquil.

The two men then lay down together, placed their weapons within reach, and ere long the calmness of their breathing indicated that they were asleep. Nothing disturbed their sleep and the night passed quietly. A few moments before sunrise Loyal Heart awoke; a feeble light was beginning to penetrate into the rancho, through the windows, which had no sheltering or curtains. The hunter rose, and at the moment when he was going to awake his comrade, the latter opened his eyes.

"Ah, ah!" Loyal Heart said, "you are a very light sleeper."

"It is an old hunter's habit, which I think I should find it difficult to get rid of, unless I remained a long time with you."

"What prevents your doing so? Such a determination would cause great pleasure to my mother and myself."

"Do not form plans, my boy; you know that with us wood-rangers we can hardly call the present moment our own, and it would be madness for us to enter on the future. We will revert to this subject; but now we have something more important to attend to."

"We have to perform the commission Black-deer intrusted to us; are you still of a mind to help me?"

"Certainly."

"Then, go to your comrades, get ready to mount, and wait for me; I shall join them directly at their call."

"All right," Tranquil answered.

The two men left the house; no Eusebio had deserted his hammock, and was probably attending to

household duties. The Canadian went straight to the calli occupied by his comrades.

Day had by this time entirely broken; the curtains of the callis were raised one after the other, and the Indian squaws were beginning to emerge to go in quest of the necessary wood and water for the preparation of breakfast. Small parties of warriors were going off in different directions, some to indulge in the pleasures of the chase, others to beat the forest and be certain that there was no enemy's trail in the vicinity of the village.

At the moment when the Canadian passed in front of the medicine-lodge, the sorcerer of the tribe came out of it. He held in his hand a calabash filled with water, in which a bunch of wormwood was dipped. The sorcerer ascended to the roof of the medicine-lodge, and turned to the rising sun. At the same instant the hachesto shouted three different times in a powerful voice, "The sun! the sun! the sun!"

A warrior then came out of each calli, holding in his hand, like the sorcerer, a calabash of water with a bunch of wormwood. The sorcerer began an incantation by murmuring mysterious words which he alone comprehended, and sprinkled the four cardinal points with the wormwood, an operation imitated exactly by the warriors. Then, at a signal given by the sorcerer, all the men threw the contents of the calabash toward the sun.

Tranquil, who was perfectly conversant with Indian customs, had stopped and waited, in a respectful attitude, the end of the ceremony. When the sorcerer had disappeared in the medicine-lodge, the hunter resumed his walk. The inhabitants of the village already regarded him as one of themselves; the woman saluted him with a smile and a pleasant word as he passed, and the children ran up laughing to bid him good-day. When Tranquil entered the calli his comrades were still asleep, but he soon roused them.

"Hilloh!" John Davis said, good-humoredly, "you are very early, old hunter. Are we going to make any expedition?"

"Not that I know of, for the present, at any rate," the Canadian answered; "we are merely going to accompany Loyal Heart, while he accomplishes a ceremony."

"What is up, then?"

"The marriage of our friend Black-deer. I supposed it to be good policy not to refuse our aid, especially as you have an interest in getting into the good graces of the Indians."

"I should think so. But tell me, have you consulted with our friends on the matter that brings me here?"

"Not yet; various reasons urged me to wait for a favorable moment."

"As you please; but you know the matter is pressing."

"I know it, and you can trust to me."

"Oh! I leave you to act entirely as you please. What are we to do now?"

"Nothing but mount our horses, and wait till Loyal Heart comes to fetch us. He has undertaken the management of the ceremony."

"Well, that is not very difficult," the American said, with a laugh.

In an instant the hunters were up, performed their ablutions, and saddled their horses. They had scarce mounted, ere a great noise of shells, drums, and chichikoues, mingled with shouts of joy, shots, and the sharp barking of all the dogs in the village, announced the arrival of Loyal Heart. The young chief advanced at the head of a procession of Indian warriors, dressed in their most magnificent costumes, armed and painted for war, and mounted on superb mustangs, which they caused to curvet with marks of the most lively delight. The procession halted before the calli.

"Well," Loyal Heart asked, "are you ready?"

"We are waiting for you," Tranquil answered.

"Come on, then."

The five hunters placed themselves by the side of their friend, and the procession started once more. The Indians saw with a feeling of pleasure the strange hunters join them; the part Loyal Heart and Tranquil took in the ceremony caused them great joy, and inspired them with considerable pride, by proving to them that their pale-face friends, far from despising their customs or displaying an indifference toward them, took an interest in the ceremony.

Loyal Heart proceeded straight to Blackbird's calli, in front of which a fire had been lighted, and the chief's family were seated silent and motionless around it. Black-bird, dressed in his war-paint, and mounted on his battle-charger, rode at the head of some twenty warriors of his family. At the moment when the procession reached the great square, a solitary horseman, with a haughty demeanor, was crossing it, and proceeded to the council-lodge. It was Blue-fox. At the sight of the procession, a smile of undefinable meaning played round his lips, and he halted to let the Comanche warriors pass. Tranquil whispered to Loyal Heart—

"Be on your guard against that man; if I am not greatly mistaken, his mission is only a trap, and he meditates some treachery."

"That is my notion too," the hunter replied; "that gloomy face forebodes nothing good; but the council are warned, and watch him closely."

"I have known him for a long time, he is a thorough villain. I would not let him out of my sight, were I in your place. But we have reached our destination, so let us attend to our own business."

Loyal Heart raised his arm; at this signal the music, such a name can be given to the abominable row made by all these instruments, which, held by unskilful hands, produced the most discordant sounds, was silent as if by enchantment. The warriors then seized their war-whistles, and produced a shrill and prolonged note thrice. A similar whistle was immediately given by Blackbird's party. When the procession halted, a vacant space of twenty yards was left between the two bands, and Loyal Heart and Tranquil advanced alone into this space, making their horses prance and brandishing their weapons, amid the joyous shouts of the crowd, which admired their skill and good countenance. Blackbird and two of his comrades then left their party and rode to meet the hunters, and the five men halted at about halfway. Loyal Heart, after saluting the chief respectfully, was the first to speak.

"I see that my father is a great chief," he said;

"his head is covered by the sacred feathered cap of the band of the old dogs; numerous exploits are painted on his broad chest; the wolf-tails fastened to his heels make a hole in the ground, so many are they. My father must be one of the greatest braves of the Antelope Comanches; he will tell us his name, that I may remember it as that of a chief of renown in the council, and brave and terrible in combat."

The chief smiled proudly at this point-blank compliment; he bowed with dignity, and answered—

"My son is young, and yet wisdom dwells in him; his arm is strong in fight, and his tongue is not forked; his renown has reached me; my brothers call him Loyal Heart. Blackbird is happy to see him. What motive brings Loyal Heart to Blackbird with so large a party, when the heart of the chief is sad, and a cloud has spread over his mind?"

"I know," Loyal Heart answered, "that the chief is sad, and am aware of the motive of his grief. I have come with the braves who accompany me to restore tranquillity to the mind of the chief, and change his sorrow into joy."

"My son Loyal Heart will then explain himself; he knows that a man of heart never plays with the grief of an aged man."

"I know it, and will explain myself without further delay. My father is rich, the Wacondah has always regarded him with a favorable eye; his family is numerous, his sons are already brave warriors, his daughters are virtuous and lovely; one of them, the fairest, perhaps, but certainly the one most beloved, was violently carried off last night by Black-deer."

"Yes," the chief answered, "a Comanche warrior bore away my daughter Bounding Fawn, and fled with her into the forest."

"That warrior is Black-deer."

"Black-deer is one of the most celebrated warriors and wisest chiefs of my nation. My heart leaped toward him. Why did he carry off my child?"

"Because Black-deer loves Bounding Fawn; a great brave has the right to take anywhere the wife who pleases him, if he is rich enough to pay her father for her. Blackbird cannot object to that."

"If such be Black-deer's intention, if he offer me a ransom such as a warrior like him ought to pay to a chief like myself, I will allow that he has acted in an honorable way, and that his intentions were pure; if not, I shall be an enemy to him, because he will have betrayed my confidence and deceived my hopes."

"Black-deer must not hastily judge his friend; I am ordered by Black-deer to pay for Bounding Fawn such a ransom as few chiefs have ever before received."

"What is the ransom? where is it?"

"The warriors who accompany me have brought it with them; but, before delivering it to my father, I will remark that he has not invited me to sit down by his fire, or offered me the calumet."

"My son will sit down by my fire, and I will share the calumet with him when the mission he is intrusted with is finished."

"Be it so; my father shall be immediately satisfied."

Loyal Heart, turning to the warriors, who during the conversation, which was sternly demanded by the laws of Indian etiquette, had stood silent and motionless, raised his hand. At once several horsemen left the procession and pranced up to him, brandishing their weapons.

"The ransom!" he merely said.

"One moment," Blackbird objected; "of what does the ransom consist?"

"You shall see," Loyal Heart replied.

"I know that, but should prefer being informed beforehand."

Loyal Heart was perfectly acquainted with his man, and hence was not much affected by his demand; he merely ordered the bearers of the ransom to approach.

This ransom had been prepared for a long period by Black-deer, and was really magnificent; it consisted of four mares in foal, four others which had never bred, a three-year old charger, a mustang with slim legs and flashing eye, four muskets, each with twelve charges of powder; and four white female buffalo-hides, a color very rare, and greatly esteemed in this country. As the several articles were presented to the old chief, his eyes dilated under the influence of joy, and flashed with a wild luster. When all the presents had been given and placed by him under the immediate guard of his relatives and friends, Loyal Heart spoke again.

"Is my father satisfied?" he asked him.

"Wah!" the old chief shouted with delight. "My son, Black-deer, is a great brave; he did right to carry off Bounding Fawn, for she is really his."

"Will my father bear witness to that?" the hunter pressed him.

"This very moment," the chief answered eagerly, "and before all the warriors here present."

"Let my father do so, then, that all may know that Black-deer is no false-tongued thief; and when he declares that Bounding Fawn is his squaw, no one will have the right to say that it is not true."

"I will do so," Blackbird answered.

"Good! my father will follow us."

"I will follow you."

Blackbird then placed himself at the right of Loyal Heart; the band of warriors who accompanied him joined the procession, and all proceeded toward the ark of the first man, at the foot of which the hachesto was standing, holding in his hand the totem of the tribe. The sorcerer was standing in front of the totem, having on either side of him two sachems.

"What do you want here?" the sorcerer asked Loyal Heart, when the latter halted about two yards from him with the procession.

"We demand justice," the hunter replied.

"Speak! we will give you that justice, whatever the consequences may be," the sorcerer said.

"We shall only have to repent of one thing, and that is not having appeared before you earlier."

"My ears are open."

"We wish that justice should be done to a warrior, whose reputation attempts have been made to tarnish."

"Who is the warrior?"

"Black-deer."

"Is his medicine good?"

"His medicine is good."

"Is he a brave?"

"He is a great brave."

"What has he done?"

"Last night he carried off Bounding Fawn, the daughter of Blackbird here present."

"Good! has he paid a fine ransom?"

"Let Blackbird himself answer."

"Yes," the old chief here said, "I will answer. Black-deer is a great warrior, he has paid a noble ransom."

"In that case," said the sorcerer, "my son is satisfied?"

"I am satisfied."

There was a momentary silence, during which the sorcerer consulted in a whisper with the sachems who acted as assessors. At length he spoke again:

"Black-deer is a great warrior," he said, in a loud voice. "I, the medicine-man, standing beneath the totem of the tribe, declare that he has employed the right all renowned warriors possess of seizing their property wherever they may find it. From this moment Bounding Fawn is the squaw of Black-deer, to prepare his food, clean his weapons, carry his burdens, and take care of his war-chargers, and whoever says the contrary speaks falsely! Black-deer has the right to convey Bounding Fawn to his calli, and no one can prevent it: he is empowered, if he deceive him, to cut off her nose and ears. Blackbird will give two female buffalo-hides, to be hung up in the great medicine-lodge."

At this final clause, known beforehand, however, for everything is strictly regulated by the code of etiquette, in the matter of marriage, Blackbird made a frightful grimace. It seemed to him hard to part with two of the hides he had received but a few moments previously. But Loyal Heart came to his assistance, and interposed in a way that brought the smile back to his lips.

"Black-deer," he said, in a loud voice, "loves Bounding Fawn, and will only owe her to himself—he alone will pay the tribute to the Wacondah; not two, but four buffalo-hides will be given to the medicine-lodge."

He made a sign, and a warrior advanced, bearing the hides across his horse's neck. Loyal Heart took them and offered them to the sorcerer.

"My father will receive these skins," he said; "he will make such use of them as will be most agreeable to the Master of Life."

At this unexpected generosity, the audience burst into shouts of frenzied joy. The shells, drums, and chichikoues recommenced their infernal noise, and the procession set out again for Blackbird's calli. When the procession reached the calli, he said, in a loud voice—

"My brothers and friends, deign to honor with your presence the marriage banquet, and I shall be happy to see you take part in it. My son, Black-deer, will come I feel convinced, to give the feast that family appearance which it ought to have."

He had scarce uttered the words, when a great noise was heard. The crowd parted violently, and in the space left free a horseman appeared, galloping at full speed; he held a woman on his horse's neck with one hand, while with the other he led a filly. At the sight of the horseman, the shouts and applause were redoubled, for everybody recognized Black-deer. On reaching the calli, he leaped to the ground without a syllable; then he drew his scalping-knife and buried it in the neck of the filly. The poor brute gave a plaintive whining, trampled violently and sunk to the ground. The chief then turned it on its back, ripped open its chest, and tearing out the still quivering heart, he touched Bounding Fawn's forehead with it, while shouting in a voice loud enough to be heard by all the spectators:

"This is my squaw; woe to the man who touches her."

"I am his," the young wife then said.

The official ceremony was over. Black-deer and Bounding Fawn were married according to the rites of Comanche law. All dismounted and the marriage feast began. The white men, who were not very eager to eat their portion of this Indian meal, composed in great measure of dog, boiled milk, and horse's flesh, had drawn on one side and tried to escape unnoticed. Unfortunately Blackbird and Black-deer saw them, and cut off their retreat; hence they were compelled to sit down to the banquet.

Tranquil, Loyal Heart and their comrades made up their minds to the worst, and ate, or pretended to eat, with as good an appetite as the rest of the guests. The repast was prolonged until late in the day; for, though the Comanches do not drink spirits, and have not to fear intoxication, still, like all Indians, they are extraordinarily voracious, and eat till they can swallow no more.

At the moment when Loyal Heart and Tranquil rose to retire, Black-deer approached them.

"Where are my brothers going?" he asked.

"To my calli," Loyal Heart replied.

"Good! Black-deer will join them there soon; he has to speak with his brothers on serious matters."

"Let my brother remain with his friends, to-morrow will be time enough."

The chief frowned.

The hunter, struck by the chief's anxious air, looked at him with alarm.

"What is the matter?" he asked him.

"My brother will know in an hour."

"Very good, chief; I will await you in my calli."

"Black-deer will come there."

The chief then withdrew, laying his finger on his lip, and the hunters went off deep in thought.

CHAPTER X.

RETURN TO LIFE.

We will now go back to one of the principal actors of our story, whom we have too long neglected; we allude to White Scalper. The readers of the "Freebooters" (DIME LIBRARY No. 151,) will doubtless remember that the terrible combat on the deck of the brig, between Tranquil and the Scalper, was continued in the sea, into which the ferocious old man had been hurled by the negro who followed him.

Quoniam had told the Canadian of the death of his enemy; the negro acted in good faith, and really believed he had killed him. The last dagger-stab dealt by Quoniam was buried deep in the old man's chest; the Scalper immediately ceased resistance; his eyes closed, his nerves relaxed like broken springs; he lost hold of his enemy, to whom he had hitherto clung, and remained an inert mass, tossed at the mercy of the waves.

The negro, exhausted with fatigue and half suffocated, hastened back to the deck of the vessel, certain that his enemy was dead; but it was not so. The Scalper had merely lost his senses, and his inanimate body was picked up by a Mexican boat. But, when this boat reached the shore, the crew, on seeing the horrible wounds which covered the stranger's body, his pallor and corpse-like immobility, had, in their turn, fancied him dead, and taking no further trouble about him, threw him back into the sea. Fortunately for the Scalper, the boat was close to land, so that his body, supported by the waves, was deposited on the sand, the lower part remaining submerged, while the head and chest were left dry by the retirement of the waves.

The fresh night air, together with the oscillating movement the sea imparted to the lower part of his body, caused the old man to give a slight start an hour after; a sigh heaved his powerful chest, and an attempt to change his position clearly showed that his vigorous organization was struggling energetically against death. At length the wounded man opened his eyes, but profound gloom still enveloped him. On the other hand, the fatigue produced by the gigantic struggle he had sustained, and the great quantity of blood which had escaped through his wounds, caused him a general weakness, so great, both morally and physically, that it was impossible for the Scalper to find out where he was, or to remember the circumstances which had brought him there.

In vain he tried to move a few yards from the sea, at the edge of which he was lying, and which would infallibly swallow him up if his weakness overcame his will and betrayed his courage.

The slightest movement the Scalper attempted occasioned him unheard of sufferings, not only through the numerous wounds, whose lips were filled with sand and gravel, but also because he saw that all his efforts would lead to no result, and that, unless a miracle happened, he was infallibly lost.

That miracle, which the wretch did not hope for, Providence, whose ways are impenetrable, was preparing to perform at the moment when the wounded man, his strength and energy exhausted, was falling back conquered on the beach, resolved to await coldly that death which he could not avoid.

The Texans had scattered along the beach several parties of freebooters, who were to watch the movements of the Mexican cruisers. These parties were all within hail of each other, and able to assemble at a given point with extreme rapidity. When the Scalper's body was again thrown into the sea it touched shore not far from a rather large rancho standing close to the beach, and in which the most influential chiefs of the Texan army were this night assembled. Naturally the approaches to the rancho were carefully guarded, and numerous patrols marched around it in order to insure the safety of the chiefs.

One of these patrols had seen the Mexican boats land, and hurried to drive them off, which they easily effected. When the boats got out to sea the Texans began carefully examining the beach but only found the wounded man. The first to discover the Scalper's body summoned his comrades, and soon the wounded man had many around him. At first they fancied him dead; the Scalper heard all that was said, but was unable to make a move or utter a word. He felt terribly alarmed. It was when a freebooter, after bending over and carefully examining him, rose with the careless remark:

"The man is dead; we have nothing to do but dig a hole in the sand and put him in it, so that the coyotes and vultures can not devour his corpse. Some of you go and fetch the largest stones you can find while we dig a hole here with our machetes."

At this sentence, pronounced in a perfectly calm and careless voice, as if it were the simplest and most natural thing in the world, the Scalper felt a cold perspiration beading at the root of his hair, and a shudder of terror ran over his body. He made a tremendous effort to speak or shriek, but it was in vain. He was in that almost cataleptic state in which although the intellect retains all its lucidity, the body is an inert and insensible mass which no longer obeys.

"Stay," said another adventurer interposing, and checking by a sign those who were preparing to pick up the stones; "let us not be in such a hurry. This poor wretch is made after God's own image; although he is in a pitiable state, a breath of life may still be left in him. We shall still be in a position to bury him if we find that he is really dead; but first let us assure ourselves that any assistance is in vain."

"Nonsense," the first speaker continued; "Fray Antonio is always like that; were we to listen to him, all the dead would only be wounded, and he would make us lose precious time in given them useless care. However, as there is nothing to hurry us at this moment, I ask no better than to try and bring this man round, although he appears to me as dead as a fellow can well be."

"No matter," Fray Antonio answered, "let us try, at any rate."

"Very good," said the other with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And first let us remove him from here. When he is perfectly dry, and runs no further risk of being carried off by the waves, we will see what we have to do."

The wounded man was immediately picked up by four freebooters and gently carried some twenty yards off to a dry spot. The worthy monk then produced a large case bottle of rum, which he uncorked, and after explaining his duty to each, that is to say, after ordering that the temples, wrists and pit of the stomach should be vigorously rubbed with rum, he bent over him, and opening his jaws, which were tight as a vise, with the blade of his dagger, he poured into his mouth an honest quartern of rum. The effect of this double treatment was not long delayed. In a few seconds the wounded man gave a slight start, opened his eyes feebly, and gave vent to a sigh of relief.

"Ah, ah," said Fray Antonio, with a laugh; "what do you think of that, No Ruperto? I fancy your dead man is coming to life again, eh?"

"On my word, it is true," the other answered, with a grin; "well, that is a man who can better himself when having his soul sewed into his body; by God, but if he is never, which I do not at all doubt, he can say that he has made a pretty long journey."

In the mean time the friction was continued with the same vigor; the circulation of the blood was rapidly re-established; the Scalper's eyes became less haggard, his features were relaxed, and an expression of comfort spread over his countenance.

"Do you feel better?" the monk asked him, kindly.

"Yes," he answered in a weak, though perfectly distinct voice.

"All the better. With the help of Heaven we will get you out of the scrape."

By a singular accident the monk had not yet recognized the man to whom he had himself owed his life a few months previously. The wounds were carefully washed with rum and water, and cleared from the sand and gravel adhering to them; they were then poulticed with pounded oregano leaves, an extremely effective remedy for wounds, and then carefully tied up.

"There," the monk continued, with an air of satisfaction, "that is finished. I will now have you carried to a spot where you will be much better able than here to enjoy that repose which is indispensable for you after so rude a shock."

"Do what you please with me," the wounded man answered with an effort; "I owe you too much to offer the slightest objection."

"The more so," Ruperto answered with a laugh. "because it would be perfectly useless; the reverend father has undertaken your cure, and, whether you like it or no, you must follow his prescriptions."

At a sign from Fray Antonio four powerful men raised the patient in their arms and carried him into the rancho. It was he whom Colonel Melendez had seen go in, when, led by chance to the same rancho, he had for some minutes listened to and surveyed what was going on inside. The rancho belonged to a rich Texan hacendado, a devoted partisan of the revolution, and who was delighted to place at the disposal of the chiefs a retreat which he had built in happier times for a summer villa. This house, while agreeably situated and spacious, was abundantly provided not only with everything indispensable for existence, but also with those thousand trifles and luxuries which are conventionally called comfort, and which rich persons, through lengthened habit, cannot do without.

The chiefs were at first rather annoyed at the free and easy way in which Fray Antonio, without giving them notice, had incumbered them with a wounded stranger. But when they saw in what a pitiable state the poor fellow was, they made no further objection, but allowed the monk to install him where he thought best. Fray Antonio did not allow the permission to be repeated. Aided by the master of the rancho, he transported the wounded man to a spacious and airy room, whose windows looked out on the sea.

So soon as the patient was laid in a bed expressly made for him—for in these torrid climates the inhabitants are accustomed to sleep on mats, or at the most in hammocks—the monk handed him a narcotic drink, which he swallowed. The effect was almost immediate; a few minutes after he had drunk it, White Scalper fell into a sound sleep. The entire night passed without any incident; the wounded man slept for eight hours at a stretch, and when he awoke he felt fresh and cheerful.

Several days passed thus, during which Fray Antonio paid him the closest attention. If, at the first moment, the monk was unable to recognize the White Scalper, it was not long ere he did so by daylight; after carefully examining this man whose appearance had really something strange and remarkable about it, his recollection returned, and he recognized the hunter so greatly feared on the prairie by the red-skins, and even by the whites, and to whom himself owed his life under such singular circumstances; hence, he was pleased at the opportunity chance afforded him of repaying his debt to this man. But, on the other hand, the wounded man did not appear at all to remember him, the monk kept his discovery to himself, and continued his attentions, without making the slightest allusion which might cause the other to suspect that he was recognized.

Things went on thus till the day of the battle of Cerro Pardo. In the morning, as usual, Fray Antonio entered his patient's room, whose cure was rapidly advancing. His wounds were also cicatrized, and he felt his strength returning.

"My friend," said the monk to him, "I have done all for you I morally could; you will do me the justice of saying that I nursed you like a brother."

"I have only thanks to offer you," the wounded man said, stretching out his hand.

"Much obliged," said Fray Antonio, as he took this hand; "to-day I have bad news for you."

"Bad news?" the other repeated in surprise.

"After all," the monk continued, "the news may be good. Still, to deal frankly with you, I do not believe it; I augur no good from what we are going to do."

"I must confess that I do not at all understand you, so I should feel extremely obliged if you would explain yourself more clearly."

"That is true. Indeed, you cannot suspect anything. In two words, this is the affair: the army has received orders to march forward this very morning."

"So that—" the wounded man asked.

"I am, to my great regret," the monk said with a crafty smile, "compelled to leave you behind."

"Hum!" the White Scalper muttered in some alarm.

"Unless," Fray Antonio continued, "as I dare not hope, we beat the Mexicans, in which case you are certain to see me again."

The patient seemed to grow more and more restless about the position in which he ran a risk of being left.

"No, you come solely to tell me that?" he asked.

"Did I wished to make you a proposal?"

"What is it?" the other eagerly asked.

"Listen. I picked you up in a most desperate state."

"That is true; I allow it."

"Although some people say," Fray Antonio continued, "that you received your wounds in fighting against us, and, indeed, some of our men declare themselves certain of the fact, I would not put faith in their words. I know not why, but since I have been nursing you, I have grown to take an interest in you; I should not like the cure I have carried on hitherto so successfully, to break down. This is

what I propose: about one hundred miles from the spot where we now are, there is an encampment of white men and half-breeds, over whom I possessed considerable influence some time back. I believe that they have not yet quite forgotten me, and that any one joining them as from me, would meet with a kindly reception. Will you go there? It is a risk to run."

"How could I perform this journey in my present state of weakness and prostration?"

"That need not trouble you. Four men, who are devoted to me, will conduct you to my old friends."

"Oh, if that be the case," the Scalper exclaimed eagerly, "I gladly accept. If I perished on the road I would prefer that to remaining here alone."

"I trust that you will not perish, but reach your destination all right. So that is agreed. You will go?"

"With the greatest pleasure. When do we start?"

"At once, there is not a moment to lose."

"Good! give the necessary orders, I am ready."

"I must warn you, however, that the men to whom I am sending you, are slightly of a scampish nature, and you must not assume any high moral tone with them."

"What does it concern me? If they were even pirates of the prairies, believe me, I should attach no importance to the fact."

"Bravo! I see that we understand each other, for I believe these worthy gentlemen dabble a little in all trades."

"Good, good!" the Scalper gayly answered; "do not trouble yourself about that."

"In that case, get ready to start; I shall return in ten minutes at the latest."

With these words the monk left the room. The old man, who had not many preparations to make, was soon in a position to take the road. As he had stated, within ten minutes the monk returned, followed by four men. Among them was Ruperto, who, it will be remembered, advised to bury the wounded man in the sand. The Scalper was still very weak, and incapable of either walking or sitting a horse. The monk had remedied this as far as possible by having a litter prepared, carried by two mules, and in which the wounded man could recline. This mode of transport was very slow, and extremely inconvenient, especially for the guides, in a country such as they had to cross; but it was the only one practicable at the moment, and so they must put up with it. The wounded man was carried to the litter, and laid on it as comfortably as was possible.

"And now," said the monk, "may Heaven direct you; do not feel at all alarmed, Ruperto has my instructions, and I know him well enough to be convinced that he will not depart from them, whatever may happen. So you can trust to him. Good-by!"

And after giving the wounded man his hand, Fray Antonio made a movement to retire.

"One moment," said the old man, as he held the hand he had taken; "I wish to say but one word to you."

"Speak, but be brief. I have the weightiest reasons for desiring your immediate departure: in a few minutes some wounded men will arrive here, who have hitherto been kept in the fort, and whom you would probably not be at all pleased to meet."

"I fancy I can understand to whom you allude; but that is not the question. I wish, before parting with you, and not knowing whether I shall ever see you again, to express to you the gratitude I feel for your conduct toward me, a gratitude which is the greater because I am convinced you have recognized me."

"And suppose I have?"

"You needed only to say one word to surrender me to my most inveterate enemies; and yet you did not utter that word."

"Certainly not; for even supposing, as you seem to believe, that I have recognized you, I was only discharging a debt I had incurred with you."

The old man's face writhed; his eye became moist; he warmly squeezed the monk's hand, which he had till now held in his own, and it was with much emotion and tenderness that he added—

"Thanks. This kindness will not be lost; the events of the last few days have greatly modified my way of looking at certain things; you shall never regret having saved my life."

"I hope so; but be gone, and may Heaven guard you!"

"We shall meet again."

"Who knows?" the monk muttered, as he gave the guides a signal.

The latter flogged their mules, and the litter began moving. About an hour after the start, it met a covered cart, in which lay Tranquil, but they passed without seeing each other. The monk had only spoken the truth about Ruperto. The worthy adventurer was most attentive to the sick man, carefully watching over him, and trying to while away the tedium of the journey. Unluckily, the party had to cross an essentially primitive country, in which there were no roads. The litter advanced but slowly, and with great difficulty, along the alaminable tracks, and, despite the most minute precautions, the wounded man suffered much from the jolting the mules gave the litter almost every moment.

Ruperto, to fatigue the patient as little as possible, only traveled by night, or very early in the morning, ere the sun had acquired its full strength. They marched thus for a fortnight, during which the country grew wilder, and the ground gradually ascended; the scenery became more abrupt and stern, the virgin forests closed in, and they could see that they were approaching the mountains.

One evening, when the little party had established their night bivouac on the banks of a rapid stream that flowed into the Arkansas, the Scalper, who, in spite of the privations and fatigue to which he had been constantly exposed since his departure from the rancho, felt his strength gradually returning, asked his guide how many days their journey would still last, which as yet he had been unwilling to do through a feeling of delicacy. At this question Ruperto smiled cunningly.

"Our journey has been finished for the last four days," he said.

"What do you mean?" the Scalper asked, with a start of surprise.

"The people we are going to see," the adventurer went on, "do not like to receive visits without being previously advised; surprises do not agree with

them. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, which is always to be regretted between old friends, I employed the only means in my power."

"And what is it?"

"Oh, it is very simple. Just look at our camp—do people guard themselves in this way on the desert? Instead of being at the top of a hill, we are at the watering-place of the wild beasts; the smoke from our fire, instead of being concealed, is, on the contrary, visible for a great distance. Do all these acts of imprudence, committed purposely, teach you nothing?"

"Ah, ah," the old man said, "then you wish your friends to surprise us?"

"Quite right. In that way the recognition will be effected without striking a blow. And stay! if I am not mistaken, we are about to receive visitors."

At this moment the branches of a neighboring thicket were roughly parted, and several men rushed into the camp, with the machete in one hand, the rifle in the other.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PIRATES OF THE PRAIRIES.

The White Scalper gave an imperceptible start at the unexpected appearance of the strangers; but he had sufficient power over himself to preserve that coolness and stoicism which the red-skins and wood-rangers make a point of honor. He did not alter the careless attitude he was in, and though he appeared to look at the newcomers absently, he, however, examined them attentively.

They were at least twenty in number, for they had risen from all sides at once, and in a twinkling surrounded the travelers. These men, mostly clad in the trapper's hunting-shirt and fox-skin cap, had a vigorous appearance and ferocious look, not at all adapted to inspire confidence; moreover, they were armed to the teeth with rifle, machete, scalping-knife and tomahawk.

The man who appeared to be their chief was at the most thirty-five years of age, tall and well-built; his wide forehead, black eyes, Grecian nose and large mouth made up a face pleasing at the first glance, though on examining it more closely you soon perceived that a sardonic smile constantly played round his thin and pale lips. Thick black curls fell on his shoulders and mixed with a large beard, which the fatigues of a wandering and adventurous life were beginning to silver in places.

The four Texan adventurers had not made a move; the chief of the strangers looked at them for a moment with his hands crossed on his rifle-barrel, the butt of which rested on the ground. At length by a movement that was familiar to him he threw back his curls, and addressed Ruperto—

"Hello, gossip," he said, "you here? what has brought you into our parts?"

"A wish to see you, gossip," the other answered, as he carelessly struck a light for the cigarette he had just finished rolling.

"Nonsense! only that?" the stranger continued.

"What other motive could I have, Master Sandoval?"

"Who knows?" the other said with a shake of his head; "life has such strange changes."

"This time you are mistaken. Nothing disagreeable forces me to pay you a visit."

"That is more and more extraordinary. Then, you have come on your own accord?"

"I do not say that, for my visit necessarily has a motive. Still, it is not at all of the nature you suppose."

"Canarios! I am glad to see that I am not so far from the truth as it appeared at first."

"All the better!"

"But why did you not come straight to our encampment, if you were seeking us, as you say?"

Ruperto burst into a laugh.

"That would have been a fine idea, to be welcomed with a shower of slugs! No, I think I acted more wisely as I have."

"We have been on your trail for three days."

"Why did you not show yourself sooner?"

"I was not quite certain it was you."

"Well, that is possible. Will you not sit down?"

"What for? now that we have met, I hope you will come to our camp?"

"I did not like to propose it; you see we are not alone, but have a stranger with us."

"What matter, if you answer for him?"

"With my life."

"Well, then, the friends of our friends are ours, and have a claim to our attention."

"I thank you, caballero," the Scalper replied with a bow; "I trust you will have no cause to repent having offered me hospitality."

"The company in which I find you is an excellent guarantee to me, señor," the adventurer continued with a courteous smile.

"Do you intend to lead us to your camp to-night?"

Ruperto asked.

"Why not? we are not more than fifteen miles from it at the most."

"That is true; but this caballero is wounded, and so long a distance after a fatiguing day—"

"Oh, I feel very well, I assure you. My strength has almost entirely returned; I even believe that were it absolutely necessary, I could sit a horse. Hence do not put yourself out of the way for me, I beg," the old man said.

"As it is so, we will start whenever you like."

"All right," said Sandoval; "I will undertake to lead you by a road which will shorten your distance one half."

All being thus arranged, the horses were saddled afresh, and they started. The strangers were on foot; the Scalper would not enter the litter, and even insisted on it being left behind, declaring that he did not want it, and cutting a rather long branch, he converted it into a staff. He then took his place by Sandoval's side, who, delighted by his manner, gave him a glance of satisfaction.

Sandoval, as we have said, was the chief of the men who had so suddenly fallen on the bivouac of the adventurers. These men were pirates of the prairies.

Captain Sandoval's band was one of the strongest and best organized in Upper Arkansas; his comrades, all thorough food for the gallows, formed the most magnificent collection of bandits that could be imagined. For a long period, Fray Antonio had taken part in its operations, and derived illegal profit by supplying the captain with information about the

passage of caravans, their strength, and the road they intended to follow. Although the worthy monk had given up this hazardous traffic, his conversion had not been of so old a date for the pirates to have completely forgotten the services he had rendered them; hence, when he was compelled to abandon White Scalper he thought at once of his old friends. This idea occurred to him the more naturally, because White Scalper, owing to the mode of life he had hitherto led in the desert, had in his character some points of resemblance with the pirates, who, like him, were pitiless, and recognized no other law than their caprice.

In the band of freebooters the monk had organized since his reformation were some men more beaten than the others by the tempest of an adventurous life. These men Fray Antonio had seen at work, and set their full value upon them; but he kept them near him, through a species of intuition, in order to have them under his hand if some day fate desired that he should be compelled to have recourse to a heroic remedy to get out of a scrape. Among these chosen comrades was Ruperto; hence it was to him he intrusted the choice of three men to escort the wounded man to the camp of Captain Sandoval, in Upper Arkansas. We have seen that the monk was not mistaken, and in what way Ruperto performed the commission confided to him.

It has frequently been said that honest men always recognize each other at the first glance; but the statement is far truer when applied to rogues. The White Scalper and the pirate chief had not walked side by side ten minutes ere they understood each other. The captain admired as an amateur, and especially as a connoisseur, the athletic stature of his new companion. His rigid features, which seemed carved in granite, they were so firm and marked, his black and sparkling eyes, and even his blunt and sharp mode of speech, attracted and aroused his sympathy. Several times he proposed to have him carried on the shoulders of two of his most powerful comrades across awkward spots; but the old man, although his ill-closed wounds caused him extreme suffering, and fatigue overpowered him, constantly declined these kind offers, merely replying that physical pain was nothing, and that the man who could not conquer it by the strength of his will ought to be despised as an old woman.

There could be no reply to such a peremptory mode of reasoning, so Sandoval merely contented himself with nodding an assent, and they continued their march in silence. Night had fallen for some time, but it was a bright and starry night, which allowed them to march in safety, and have no fear of losing their way. After three hours of a very difficult journey, the travelers at length reached the crest of a high hill.

"We have arrived," Sandoval then said, as he stopped under the pretext of resting a moment, but in reality to give his companion, whom he saw to be winded, though he made no complaint, an opportunity to draw breath.

"What, arrived?" the Scalper said in surprise, looking round him, but not perceiving the slightest sign of an encampment.

In fact, the adventurers found themselves on a species of platform about fifteen hundred yards long, entirely denuded of trees, save in the center, where grew an immense aloe, more than sixty feet in circumference, which looked like the king of the desert, over which it soared. Sandoval allowed his comrade to look around him for a moment, and then said, as he stretched out his arm to the giant tree—

"We shall be obliged to enter by the chimney. But once is not always, and you will not feel offended at it when I tell you that I only do this to shorten our journey."

"You know that I did not at all understand you," the Scalper answered.

"I suspected it," Sandoval said with a smile. "But come along, and you will soon know."

The old man bowed without replying, and both walked toward the tree, followed by their comrades, who were smiling at the stranger's amazement. On reaching the foot of the tree, Sandoval raised his head—

"Hallo!" he shouted, "are you there, Orson?"

"Where should I be if I was not?" a rough voice answered, issuing from the top of the tree. "I was obliged to wait for you here, as you have taken it into your head to wander about the whole night through."

The pirates burst into a laugh.

"Always amiable!" Sandoval continued; "it is astonishing how funny that animal of an Orson always is! Come, let down the ladder, you ugly brute!"

"Ugly brute, ugly brute!" the voice growled, although its owner still remained invisible: "this is the way in which he thanks me."

In the mean while a long wooden ladder was let down through the branches. Sandoval caught hold of it, secured it, and then turned to the wounded man—

"I will go first to show you the way."

"Do so," the Scalper said resolutely; "but I swear that I will be the second."

"Hallo!" the captain said, turning round, "why you are a Yankee."

"What does it matter to you?" the other said roughly.

"Not at all. Still, I am not sorry to know the fact."

"Well, you know it. What next?"

"Next?" Sandoval answered with a laugh; "you will be among countrymen, that is all."

"It makes little difference to me."

"Canarios, and how do you suppose it concerns me?" the captain said, still laughing, and ascended.

The wounded man followed him step for step. The ladder was resting against a platform about two yards in width, completely concealed in a mass of inextricable foliage. On this platform stood the giant to whom his chief had given the name of Orson, a name which was exactly suitable, so rough and savage did he appear.

"Any news?" the captain asked, as he stepped on the grotto.

"None," the other answered laconically.

"Have all the detachments returned?"

"All except you."

"Are the Gazelle and the American girl in the grotto?"

"They are."

"That is well. When all the people have come up you will remove the ladder and join us."

"All right, Caral, I suppose I know what I have to do."

Sandoval contented himself with shrugging his shoulders.

"Come," he said to the Scalper, who was a silent witness of this scene.

They crossed the platform. The center of the tree was entirely hollow, but it had not been rendered so by human agency; old age alone had converted the heart of the tree into dust, while the bark remained green and vigorous. The pirates, who had for many years inhabited a very large cave that ran under the hill, had one day seen the earth give way at a certain spot in consequence of a storm; this was the way in which the chimney, as they called it, had been discovered.

The pirates, like all plundering animals, are very fond of having several issues to their lairs; this new one, supplied to them by accident, caused them the greater pleasure, because by the same occasion they obtained an observatory, whence they could survey an immense extent of country, which enabled them to see any enemy who might attempt to take them by surprise. A platform was formed at a certain height to keep the bark intact; and by means of two ladders, fitted one inside and one out, a communication was established.

Sandoval, in his heart, enjoyed his guest's surprise. In fact, the pirate's ingenious arrangement seemed marvelous to White Scalper, who, forgetting his stoicism, allowed his surprise to be seen.

"Now," he said to him, pointing to a second ladder, which descended a considerable depth into the ground, "we will go down."

"At your service, at your service," the stranger answered. "It is really admirable. Go on, I follow you."

They then began descending cautiously owing to the darkness, for the pirate placed as sentry on the *Mirador* had either through forgetfulness or malice, neglected to bring torches, not supposing, as he said, that his companions would return so late. White Scalper alone had followed the pirates by the strange road we have indicated. This road, very agreeable for foot passengers, was, of course, completely impracticable for horsemen; hence Ruperto and his three comrades quitted Sandoval at the foot of the hill, and making a rather long detour, sought the real entrance of the cave, with which all four had long been acquainted.

As the two men gradually descended, the light increased, and they seemed to be entering a furnace. On setting foot on the ground, the Scalper found himself in an immense cavern, lighted by a profusion of torches held by pirates, who, grouped at the foot of the ladder, seemed to find an honor in waiting the arrival of their chief, and offering him a grand reception. The grotto was of an enormous size; the spot where White Scalper found himself was a vast hall, whence radiated several galleries of immense length, and running in diametrically opposite directions. The scene that offered itself to the Scalper in this hall, would have been worthy of Chlot's pencil. Here could be seen strange faces, extraordinary costumes, impossible attitudes, all of which gave a peculiar character to this multitude of bandits, who were hailing their chief with shouts of joy, and howls like those of wild beasts.

Captain Sandoval knew too well the sort of people he had to deal with, to be affected in any way by the reception his bandits had improvised for him; instead of appearing touched by their enthusiasm, he frowned, drew up his head, and looked menacingly at the attentive crowd.

"What is this, caballeros?" he said; "how comes it that you are all here waiting for me? *Viva Dios!* Some mistake must have occurred in the execution of my orders to make you collect so eagerly round me. Well, leave me, we will clear that up on another occasion, for the present I wish to be alone; begone!"

The bandits, without replying, bowed to the chief, and immediately withdrew, dispersing so promptly in the side galleries, that in less than five minutes the hall was entirely deserted. At the same moment Ruperto appeared; he had left his companions with old comrades who had undertaken to do them the honors of the grotto, and now came to join the man who had been intrusted to his care. Sandoval offered his hand cordially to the adventurer, but it was the cordiality of a man who feels himself at home, which the Texan noticed.

"Hallo!" he said, "we are no longer on the prairie, it strikes me."

"No," the captain answered, seriously, and he laid some stress on the words, "you are in my house, but," he added, with a pleasant smile, "that must not trouble you; you are my guests, and will be treated as you deserve to be."

"Good, good," Ruperto said, who would not let himself be imposed on by this cavalier manner. "I know where the shoe pinches, gossip. Well, I will find a remedy," and he turned to Orson, who at this moment came down the ladder with his rough and savage face; "beg White Gazelle to come hither; tell her particularly that Captain Sandoval wishes to see her."

The chief of the pirates smiled and offered his hand to Ruperto.

"Forgive me, Ruperto," he said to him, "but you know how I love that girl. When I am a single day without seeing her, I fancy that I want something, and feel unhappy."

"Canarios! I am well aware of it," Ruperto answered, with a smile; "hence, you see, that to restore you to your right temper I did not hesitate to give Orson orders to fetch the only person you have ever loved."

The captain sighed, but made no answer.

"Come," the adventurer continued, gayly, "she will come, so recover your spirits. Caramba! it would be a fine thing for you to feel any longer vexed about a child who probably forgot to kiss you on your return because she was at play. Remember, we are your guests, that we have the claims which hospitality gives us, and that you must not, under any pretext, look black at us."

"Alas, my friends," he answered, with a stifled sigh, "you know not, you cannot know, how sweet it is for a wretch like me, an outlaw, to be able to say to himself that there exists in the world a

creature who loves him for himself, and without after-thought."

"Silence," Ruperto said quickly, as he laid his hand on his arm, "here she comes."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE CAVERN.

RUPERTO was not mistaken: at this moment the most exquisite little creature imaginable came bounding up like a fawn. It was a girl twelve years of age at the most, fresh, smiling, and beautifully formed. Her long black hair, her rosy-lipped mouth, with its pearly teeth, her magnificent black hair floating in immense curls down to her knee, her eccentric costume, more masculine than feminine, all combined to give her a strange, fantastic appearance; a striking contrast to the vulgar and hideous bandits who surrounded her. So soon as the girl perceived the captain, a flash of delight shot from her eye, and with one bound she was in his arms.

"Ah," he said, as he kissed her silken curls, and in a voice which he tried in vain to soften, "here you are at last, my darling Gazelle; you have been long in coming."

"Father," she answered, as she repaid his caresses, and in a deliciously modulated voice, "I was not aware of your return. It was late, I did not hope to see you to-night, so I was about to sleep."

"Well, Nina," he said, as he put her on the ground again and gave her a final kiss, "you must not remain here any longer. I have seen you, I have kissed you, and my stock of happiness is laid in till to-morrow. Go and sleep. I do not wish you to lose your healthy cheeks."

"Oh," she said, with a little shake of her charming head, "I no longer feel inclined for sleep; I can remain a few minutes longer with you, father."

White Scalper gazed with growing astonishment on the admirable child, so gay, so laughing, so loving, and who appeared so beloved. He could not account for her presence among the pirates, or the affection their captain testified for her.

"You love this child very dearly," he said, as he drew her gently toward him, and kissed her on the forehead.

She looked at him with widely opened eyes, but did not evince the slightest fear, or try to avoid his caresses.

"You ask if I love her," the pirate answered; "that child is the joy and happiness of our house. Do you think, then," he added, with some bitterness, "that because we are outlawed bandits we have stifled every generous feeling in our hearts? Undeceive yourself. The jaguar and panther love their cubs, the grizzly bear cherishes its whelps; should we be more ferocious than these animals, which are regarded as the most cruel in creation? Yes, yes, we love our White Gazelle! She is our good genius, our guardian angel; so long as she remains among us we shall succeed in everything, for good fortune accompanies her."

"Oh, in that case, father," she said eagerly, "you will always be fortunate, for I shall never leave you."

"Who can answer for the future?" he muttered in a choking voice, while a cloud of sorrow spread over his manly face.

"You are a happy father," the Scalper said, with a profound sigh.

"Yes, am I not? White Gazelle is not mine alone, she belongs to us all; she is our adopted daughter."

"Ah!" said the Scalper, without adding anything more, and letting his head drop sadly.

"Go, child," Sandoval exclaimed, "go and sleep, for night is drawing on."

The child withdrew, after saluting the three men with a soft glance, and soon disappeared in the depths of a side gallery. The captain looked after her so long as he could perceive her, then turning to his guests, who, like himself, had remained under the spell of this touching scene, he said:

"Follow me, señores; it is growing late, you must be hungry, and need rest. The hospitality I am enabled to offer you will be modest, but frank and cordial."

The two men bowed and followed him into a gallery, on each side of which were cells inclosed by large mats fastened to the walls in the shape of curtains; at regular distances torches of ocote wood, fixed in iron rings, spread a reddish and smoky light, sufficient, however, to guide them. After traversing several passages communicating with each other and forming a regular labyrinth, in which any one else must inevitably have lost his way, the captain stopped before a cell, and raising the curtains that formed the doorway, made his companions a sign to enter. Sandoval followed them, and let the mat fall again behind him.

The cell into which the captain introduced his guests was vast; the walls were rather lofty, and allowed the air to penetrate through the invisible fissures, which rendered it pleasant, while wooden partitions divided it into several chambers. A golden censer, probably stolen from a church, and hanging from the roof, contained a lamp of fragrant oil, which spread a brilliant light through the cavern. Unfortunately, the rest of the furniture did not harmonize with this princely specimen, but was very modest. It was composed of a large table of black oak, clumsily shaped, six equipals, and two butacas, a sort of easy-chair with sloping back, and which alone had any pretensions to comfort. The walls were decorated with antlers of elks and bighorns, buffalo-horns, and grizzly bear claws, the *alia opima* of animals killed by the pirates during their chase on the desert.

The only thing that attracted attention was a magnificent rack, containing all the weapons used in America, from the lance, arrow, and sagaie, up to the sword, the machete, the double-barrel gun, and the holster pistol. It was evident that the pirate had given orders for the reception of his guests, for wooden plates, glasses and silver dishes were arranged on the table among large pots of red clay containing, some water, and others mezcal and pulque, those two favorite beverages of the Mexicans. Orson, with his savage face and ordinary, sulky look, was ready to wait on the guests.

"To table, señores," Sandoval said gravely, as he drew up an equipal and sat down on it.

The others followed his example, and each drawing his knife from his belt, began a general and vigorous attack on a magnificent venison pasty.

The appetite of the guests, sharpened by a long day's fasting, needed such a comforter.

The first moments of the meal were passed in silence. But when the sharpest hunger was appeased, and, according to custom, the bottle circulated, the apparent coldness that had prevailed among the company suddenly disappeared, and each began conversing with his next neighbor; then the voices were gradually raised, and ere long everybody was talking at the same time.

During the repast which threatened to degenerate into an orgie, two men alone had moderately applied themselves to the bottle; they were Sandoval and White Scalper. The chief of the pirates, while exciting his guests to drink, was very careful to retain his sobriety and coolness. He examined with some anxiety the singular man whom chance had given him as a guest; this gloomy face caused him a feeling of discomfort for which he could not account. Still he did not dare question him, for the law of the desert prohibits the slightest inquiry being made of a stranger, so long as he thinks proper to maintain his incognito.

Fortunately for Sandoval, whose impatience and curiosity momentarily increased, Ruperto had an equal desire to explain the object of his visit to the prairies. At the moment, therefore, when the private conversations, growing more and more animated, had become general, and each seemed to be trying which could shout the loudest, the Texan smote the table several times loudly with the pommel of his dagger to demand silence. The shouts stopped instantaneously, and all heads were turned toward him.

"What do you want, Ruperto?" Sandoval asked him.

"What do I want?" the other answered, whose tongue was growing dull under the influence of the numerous and copious draughts he had taken; "I want to speak."

"Silence!" the captain shouted in a stentorian voice; "now, go on, Ruperto! no one will interrupt you, even if you spoke till sunrise."

"Demonio!" the Texan said, with a laugh, "I have no pretense to abuse your patience so long."

"Act as you please, gossip; you are my guest, and more than that, an old acquaintance, which gives you the right to do whatever you please here."

"Thanks for your gallantry, captain; I must, in the first place, in my own name and in that of the persons who accompany me, offer you sincere thanks for your hospitality."

"Go on, go on," the captain said, carelessly.

"No, no; on the contrary, caramba! a table so well served as yours is not to be found every day on the prairie. A man must be as ungrateful as a monk not to feel thankful."

"Hailo!" the captain said, laughingly, "did you not tell me, when I met you this evening, that you were sent to me by Fray Antonio?"

"I did, captain."

"A worthy monk," Sandoval observed; "he reminds me of the Rev. John Zimmers, a protestant minister, who was hung about ten years back at Baton Rouge, for bigamy. He was a very holy man! I remember that at the foot of the gallows he made the crowd an edifying speech, which drew tears from most of his hearers. But let us return to Fray Antonio; I hope that no accident has happened to him, and that he still enjoys good health."

"When I left him his health was excellent. Still it is possible that he may be dangerously ill at this moment, or even dead."

"Rayo de Dios! you alarm me, gossip. Explain yourself."

"It is very simple: Texas, wearied with the incessantly renewed exactions of Mexico, has revolted to gain its liberty."

"Very good; I know it."

"You know too, of course, that all the men of talent have arrayed themselves beneath the flag of independence. Naturally Fray Antonio raised a cuadrilla, and offered his services to the insurgents."

"That is very ingenious," the captain said, with a smile.

"Is it not? Oh! Fray Antonio is a clever politician."

"Yes, yes, and proof of it is that at the beginning of the insurrection it often happened that he did not know himself to which party he belonged."

"What would you have?" Ruperto said, carelessly, "it is so difficult to find one's way in a general upset; but now it is no longer the case."

"Ah! it seems that he is fixed?"

"Completely; he forms part of the Army of Liberation. Now, on the very day of my departure the Mexican forces were marching toward the Mexican forces to offer them battle. That is why I said to you it was possible that Fray Antonio might be seriously indisposed, and perhaps even dead."

"I hope that misfortune has not happened."

"And so do I. A few minutes before setting out, Fray Antonio, who takes a great interest, as it seems, in the wounded caballero who accompanies me, not wishing to abandon him alone and helpless in the power of the Mexicans, should the Liberating Army unfortunately be conquered, ordered me to lead him to you, for he felt certain you would take great care of his friend, and treat him well, in consideration of old friendship."

"He did right to count on me; I will not deceive his confidence. Caballero," he added, turning to the old man, who during the whole of this conversation had remained cold and apathetic, "you know us by this time, and are aware that we are pirates. We offer you the hospitality of the desert, a frank and unbounded hospitality, and offer it without either asking who you are or what you have done before setting foot on our territory."

"On what conditions do you offer me all these advantages?" the old man asked, as he bowed, with cold politeness, to the chief of the bandits.

"On none, señor," he answered; "we ask nothing of you, not even your name; we are proscribed and banished men; hence, every proscription, whatever be the motives that bring him here, has a right to a place by our fire. And now," he added, as he seized a bottle and poured out a tumbler, "here is to your fortunate arrival among us, señor! Pledge me!"

"One moment, señor. Before replying to your toast I have, if you will permit me, a few words to say to you."

"We are listening to you, señor."

The old man rose, drew himself up to his full height, and looked silently at the company. A deep silence prevailed; suffering from lively anxiety, all impatiently waited for the Scalper to speak. At length he did so, while his face, which had hitherto been cold and stern, was animated by an expression of gentleness of which it would not have been thought capable.

"Señores," he said, "your frankness challenges mine; the generosity and grandeur of your reception compels me to make myself known. When a man comes to claim the support of men like yourselves, he must keep nothing hidden from them. Yes, I am proscribed! yes, I am banished! but I am so by my own will. I could return to-morrow, if I pleased, to the bosom of society, which has never repelled me. I make here neither allusions nor applications. I remain in the desert to accomplish a duty I have imposed on myself; I pursue a vengeance, an implacable vengeance, which nothing can completely satiate, not even the death of the last of my enemies! a vengeance which is only a wild dream, a horrible nightmare, but which I pursue, and shall pursue, at all hazards, until the supreme hour when, on the point of giving my last sigh, I shall die with regret at not having sufficiently avenged myself. Such is the object of my life, the cause which made me abandon the life of civilized men to take up with that of wild beasts—VENGEANCE! Now you know what I am; when I tell you my name you will be well acquainted with me."

The old man's voice, at first calm and low, had become sonorous and harsh. His hearers, involuntarily overpowered by his impassioned accents, listened with panting chests, and, as it were hanging on his lips, to this strange man, who, by revealing the secret of his life, had stirred up their hearts, and caused the only sensitive fiber that still existed there to vibrate painfully. For they, too, had but one object left, a sole desire—vengeance on that society which had expelled them like impure scum.

When the Scalper had ceased speaking, all rose as if by common accord, and, leaning their quivering hands on the table, bent over him, awaiting, with feverish impatience, the revelation of his name. But, by a strange revolution, the wounded man seemed to have forgotten what was taking place around him, and no longer to remember either where he was or what he had said. His head was bowed on his chest; with his forehead resting on his right hand and his eyes fixed on the ground, he tried in vain to overcome the flood of bitter recollections, the ever-bleeding wound which in a moment of excitement he had so imprudently revived.

Sandoval regarded him for a moment with an expression of sadness and pity, and laid his hand on his shoulder. At this touch the old man, roughly recalled to a feeling of external things, drew himself up as if he had received an electric shock, and gazed wildly round him.

"What do you want with me?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

"To tell you your name," the pirate answered, slowly.

"Ah!" he said, "then you know it?"

"Ten minutes back I was ignorant of it."

"While now—?"

"Now I have guessed it."

An ironical smile curled the old man's pale lips.

"Do you think so?" he said.

"I am sure of it; there are not two men of your stamp in the desert; you are the genius of evil if you are not White Scalper."

At this name an electric quiver traversed the limbs of the hearers. The old man raised his head haughtily.

"Yes," he said, in a sharp voice, "I am White Scalper."

During this long conversation a number of pirates, brought up either by idleness or curiosity, had entered the dining-room one after the other. On hearing this name uttered which they had been accustomed so long to admire, on seeing at length this man for whom they felt a secret terror, they burst into a formidable shout, which caused the roof to tremble as if agitated by an earthquake. The White Scalper made a signal to ask silence.

"Señores," he said, "I am very grateful for the friendly demonstrations of which I am the object. Up to the present I have refused every species of alliance; I obstinately resolved to live alone and accomplish, without help, the work of destruction to which I have devoted myself. But, after what has passed here, I must break the promise I made myself; he who receives is bound to give! Henceforth I am one of yourselves, if you deem me worthy to form part of your cuadrilla."

At this proposal the huzzas and shouts of joy were redoubled with extreme frenzy. Sandoval frowned; he understood that his precarious power was menaced. But, too skillful and crafty to let the secret fears that agitated him be guessed, he resolved to outflank the difficulty, and regain, by a master-stroke, the power which he felt instinctively was slipping from his grasp. Raising the glass he held in his hand, he shouted in a thundering voice:

"Muchachos! I drink to White Scalper!"

"To White Scalper!" the bandits joined in, enthusiastically.

Sandoval allowed the first effervescence time to calm down. By degrees the cries died out, a calm was re-established, and nothing was audible save a confused murmur of whispered words. Sandoval hastened to profit by this transient moment of silence to speak again.

"Señores," he said, "I have a proposal to make, which, I believe, will suit you."

"Speak, speak," the pirates shouted.

"Our association," Sandoval continued, "is founded on the most entire equality of its members, who freely elect the man they consider most worthy to command them."

"Yes, yes," they exclaimed.

"Long live Sandoval!" some said.

"Let him speak, do not interrupt him," the majority vociferated.

Sandoval, negligently leaning on the table, followed with an apparently indifferent glance these various manifestations, though he was suffering from lively anxiety, and his heart beat ready to burst his chest. He was playing for a heavy stake; he knew it, for he had, with the infallible glance of all ambitious men, calculated all the chances for and against. Hence, it was only by the strength of his

will that he succeeded in giving his face a marble rigidity which did not permit the supreme agony he was suffering internally to be divined. When silence was nearly re-established, he continued in a firm voice:

"You did me the honor to appoint me your chief, and I believe that hitherto I have rendered myself worthy of that honor."

He paused as if to await a reply. A murmur of assent gently tickled his ear.

"What is he driving at?" Orson asked in a rough voice.

"You shall know," said Sandoval, who overheard him. And he continued: "In the common interest, I consider it my duty this night to hand you back the authority with which you intrusted me. You have at present among you a man more capable than myself of commanding you, a man whose mere name will inspire terror in the heart of your enemies. In a word, I offer you my resignation, proposing that you should elect on the spot White Scalper as your chief!"

It was only then that Sandoval really knew the feeling of his comrades toward him. Of two hundred pirates assembled at this moment in the dining hall, two thirds pronounced immediately for him, energetically refusing the resignation he offered apparently with so much self-denial; one half the remaining third gave no sign of approval or disapproval. Thirty or forty of the bandits alone received the proposal with shouts of joy.

Still, as happens nearly always under similar circumstances, these thirty or forty individuals, by their shouts and yells, would soon have led away others, and would probably have become ere long an imposing majority, had not White Scalper himself interfered. The old adventurer did not at all desire the disgraceful honor of being elected the chief of this band of ruffians, whom he despised in his heart, and whom the force of circumstances alone compelled him to accept as companions. He was, on the contrary, resolved to part with them so soon as his wounds were closed, and he felt capable of recommencing his wandering life. He rose, and speaking amid the vociferations of these turbulent men, he protested energetically against the proposal made by Sandoval, not wishing, as he said, to accept anything but the honor of fighting by their side, and sharing their dangers, for he felt an incompetence to command.

In the face of such an energetic refusal, all opposition necessarily ceased, and the pirates implored Sandoval to retain the command, while protesting their devotion to him. Sandoval at length consented to retain that power which he had felt for a moment such fear of losing.

Peace was thus restored as if by enchantment, and while the pirates drank floods of mezcual to celebrate the happy conclusion of this affair, the captain led his guests to a compartment separate from the grotto, where they were at liberty at last to rest themselves. Still, Sandoval, who, rightly or wrong, had for a moment found his power threatened by White Scalper, felt a malice for him in his heart, and promised to avenge himself on the first opportunity.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CONVERSATION.

TRANQUIL and Loyal Heart returned to the rancho, where No Eusebio had made preparations to give them a hearty reception.

Dona Garillas received them with that calm and radiant smile which seemed to pass over her pale face like a sunbeam passing between two clouds.

Loyal Heart, after respectfully kissing his mother's forehead, shaking hands with No Eusebio, and patting his dogs, which leaped up at him with joyous whines, sat down at the table, making Tranquil a sign to follow his example. Since the previous night a singular change had taken place in the manner and countenance of the old hunter. He whose movements were generally so frank and steady, seemed embarrassed; his eye had lost its fire; his eyebrows continually met under the effect of some secret thought; his very speech was sharper than usual.

The young man watched pensively and with a melancholy smile the hunter's movements. When the meal was over, and the pipes were lit, after making his mother and No Eusebio a sign to withdraw, he turned to the Canadian—

"My guest," he said, affectionately, "will you let me ask you a question?"

"Of course," the hunter answered; "why not?"

"Who knows—*quien sabe!* as we Spanish Americans say," the young man replied, with a smile.

"Nonsense," the Canadian replied, carelessly; "ask your question, mine host; I cannot foresee the possibility of my being unable to answer you."

"But supposing it were so."

"I do not suppose it; you are a man of too upright sense, and too great intelligence, to fall into that error. So speak without fear."

"I will do so; listen to me. I know you too well to suppose that you have come here merely to pay me a visit, as you knew you could meet me any day on the prairie. You have, therefore, undertaken this journey with some definite object; a most serious motive impelled you to wish to see me."

Tranquil gave a silent nod of assent. Loyal Heart went on after a moment's silence, during which he seemed to be awaiting a reply, which did not come.

"You have been here now two days. You have had several opportunities for a frank explanation, which I desire with my whole heart, for I know that it will contain a service I can render you, and I shall be happy to prove to you the esteem I entertain for your character. Still, that explanation does not come; you seem, on the contrary to fear it; your manner toward me has completely changed; since yesterday, in a word, you are no longer the man I knew, the man who never hesitated, and always uttered his thoughts loudly and boldly. Am I mistaken? Answer, old hunter."

For some minutes the Canadian seemed embarrassed; this point-blank question troubled him singularly. At length he boldly made up his mind, and raised his head—

"On my word," he answered, looking his questioner firmly in the face, "I cannot contradict it; Loyal Heart, you are right—all you have said is perfectly correct."

"Ah!" the young man said with a smile of satis-

faction, "I was not mistaken, then; I am pleased to know what I have to depend on."

The Canadian shrugged his shoulders, like a man who does not at all understand, but who yet experiences a certain degree of pleasure at seeing his questioner satisfied, though he is completely ignorant why. Loyal Heart continued—

"Now, I demand in the name of that friendship that binds us—I demand, I say, that you should be frank with me, and confess to me the motives which urged you to act as you have done."

"These motives are only honorable, be assured, Loyal Heart."

"I am convinced of it, my friend; but I repeat to you, I wish to know them."

"After all," the old hunter continued with the accent of a man who has formed a resolution, "why should I have secrets from you when I have come to claim your assistance? You shall know all. From the first moment I saw you, with the first word you uttered, by a species of intuition, by one of those sympathies that are independent of the will, I felt myself attracted toward you. You were my friend during the few days we lived together, sharing the same couch under the vault of Heaven. I believed that I appreciated you at your true value, and my friendship only increased in consequence. Hence, when I needed a sure and devoted friend, I thought of you at once, and, without further reflection, started to go in quest of you."

"You did well."

"I know it," said Tranquil, with simple enthusiasm; "still, on entering this modest rancho, my ideas were completely modified; a doubt occurred to me—not about you, for that was impossible—but about your position, and the mysterious life you lead. I asked myself by what concurrence of circumstances a man like you had confined himself to an Indian village and accepted all the wretchedness of a red-skin life, a wretchedness often so cruel and opposed to our manners. On seeing your mother so lovely and so kind, your old servant so devoted, and the way in which you behave within these walls, I thought, without prejudging anything, that a great misfortune had suddenly burst on you and forced you for a time into a hard exile. But I understood that I was not your equal, that between you and me there was a distinctly traced line; then I felt oppressed in your company, for you are no longer the free hunter, you are no longer the comrade, the friend with whom I was so happy to share everything in the desert. I no longer recognize the right to treat as an equal a man whom a passing misfortune has accidentally brought near me, and who would, doubtless, at a later date, regret this intimacy that has sprung from accident; while continuing to love and esteem you, I resume the place that belongs to me."

"All of which means?" Loyal Heart said, distinctly.

"That, being no longer able to be your comrade, and not wishing to be your servant, I shall retire."

"You are mad, Tranquil," the young man exclaimed, with an outburst of impatient grief. "What you say, I tell you, has not common sense, and the conclusions you draw from it are absurd."

"Still—" the Canadian hazarded.

"Oh!" the other continued, with considerable animation, "I have allowed you to speak, have I not? I listened to whatever you had to say without interruption, and it is now your turn. Without wishing it, you have caused me the greatest pain it is possible for me to suffer; you have caused an ever-living wound to bleed, by reminding me of things which I try in vain to forget, and which will cause the wretchedness of my whole life."

"I—I?" the hunter exclaimed, with a start of terror.

"Yes, you! but what matter? besides, you were walking blindly, not knowing where you were going; hence, I have no right to be angry with you, and am not so. But there is one thing I value above all, which I esteem more than life, and that is your friendship. I cannot consent to lose it. Confidence for confidence! you shall know who I am and what motive brought me to the desert, where I am condemned to live and die."

"No," Tranquil answered, clearly, "I have no claim to your confidence. You say that I have unintentionally caused you great suffering; that suffering would only be increased by the confession you wish to make me. I swear to you, Loyal Heart, that I will not listen to you."

"You must, my friend, both for your sake and my own, for in that way we shall learn to understand one another. Besides," he added, with a melancholy smile, "this secret which crushed me, and which I have hitherto kept in my own bosom, it will be a great consolation to me, be assured, to confide to a real friend. And then, you must know this: I have no one to complain of; the terrible misfortune which suddenly fell upon me was just, though perhaps severe; I have, therefore, no one to reproach but myself. My life is only one long expiation; unhappily I tremble lest the present and the future will not suffice to expiate the past."

"You forget God, my son," a voice said, with an accent of supreme majesty, "God, who cannot fail you and will judge you. When the expiation you have imposed on yourself is completed, that God will cause it to terminate."

And Dona Garillas, who had for some moments been listening to the conversation of the two men, crossed the room with a majestic step, and laid her white and delicate hand on the shoulder of her son, while giving him a glance full of that powerful love which mothers alone possess.

"Oh! I am a wretched ingrate!" the young man exclaimed, sorrowfully; "in my lifeless optimism I for a moment forgot you, my mother, who gave up everything for me."

"Raphael, you are my first-born. What I did nine years ago I would do again to-day. But now, let what you are about to hear be a consolation to you. I am proud of you, my son; whatever pain you once caused me, the same amount of joy and pride you cause me to-day. All the Indian tribes that traverse the vast solitudes of the prairie have the greatest respect and deepest veneration for you; has not the name these primitive men have given you become the synonym of honor? are you not, in a word, Loyal Heart, that is to say, the man whose decisions have the strength of law, whose friends and enemies love and esteem? What more do you want?"

The young man shook his head sadly.

"Alas, mother," he said, in a hollow voice, "can I ever forget that I have been a gambler, assassin, and incendiary?"

Tranquil could not restrain a start of terror.

"Oh, is it possible!" he muttered.

The young man heard him, and turning to him, said:

"Yes, my friend, I have been a gambler, assassin, and incendiary. Well, now," he added, with an accent of sad and bitter railery, "do you still fancy yourself unworthy of my friendship? Do you still consider you are not my equal?"

The Canadian rose while the young man bent on him a searching glance; he went up to Dona Garillas, and bowed to her with a respect mingled with admiration.

"Senora," he said, "whatever crimes a man may have committed in a moment of irresistible passion, that man must be absolved by all when, in spite of his fault, he inspires a devotion so glorious, so perfect, and so noble as yours. You are a holy woman, madam! Hope, as you said yourself a moment back, hope, God, who is omnipotent, will, when the moment arrives, dry your tears and make you forget your sorrow. I am but a poor man, without talent or learning, but my instinct has never deceived me. I am convinced that if your son were ever guilty, he is now pardoned, even by the man who condemned him under the influence of an exaggerated feeling of honor, which he regretted at a later date."

"Thanks, my friend," Loyal Heart answered; "thanks for words which I feel convinced are the expression of your innermost thoughts. Yours is a frank and upright nature. You have restored me the courage which at times abandons me, and have raised me in my own sight; but this expiation to which I condemned myself, would not be complete unless I told you, in their fullest details, all the events of my life. No refusal," he added, with a sign to the hunter, "it must be so! Believe me, Tranquil, this story bears its own instruction. Just as the traveler, after a long and painful journey, halts by the way-side and looks with a certain degree of satisfaction at the distance he has covered, I shall feel a mournful pleasure in returning to the early and terrible events of my life."

"Yes," said his mother, "you are right, my son."

A man must have courage to look back, in order to acquire the strength to walk worthily forward. It is only by reverting to the past that you can understand the present and have hope in the future. Speak, speak, my son, and if in the course of your narrative your memory or your courage fail you, your mother will be here at your side, as I have ever been, and what you dare not or cannot say, I will say."

Tranquil regarded with admiration this strange woman, whose gestures and words harmonized so well with her majestic bearing; his mother, whose sweet face reflected so well her noble sentiments; he felt himself very wretched in the presence of this chosen nature, who, of all the passions, knew only one maternal love.

"Loyal Heart," he said, with an emotion he could not master, "since you insist, I will listen to the narrative of the events which brought you to the desert; but be assured of this, whatever I may hear, since you are willing still to give me the title of friend, here is my hand, take it, I will never fail you. Now, whether you speak or keep your secret, is of no consequence."

Loyal Heart warmly returned the pressure of the hunter's hand, and made him sit down on his right hand, while Dona Garillas took her place on his left.

"Now, listen to me," he said.

At this moment the door opened, and No Eusebio appeared.

"*Mi amo,*" he said, "the Indian chief called Black-deer wishes to speak to you."

"What, Black-deer?" the hunter said, with surprise; "impossible! he must be engaged with his marriage festivities."

"Pardon me," Tranquil observed; "you forget, Loyal Heart, that when we left the feast the chief came up to us, saying in a low voice that he had a serious communication to make to us."

"That is true; in fact, I did forget it. Let him enter, No Eusebio. My friend," he added, addressing Tranquil, "it is impossible for me at this moment to begin a story which would be interrupted almost at the first sentence; but soon, I hope, you shall know it."

"I will leave you to settle your Indian affairs," Dona Garillas said, with a smile, and, rising, she quitted the room.

Tranquil, we are bound to confess, was in his heart delighted at an interruption which saved him from listening to the narrative of painful events. The worthy hunter possessed the precious quality of not being at all curious to know the history of men he liked, for his native integrity led him to fear seeing them break down in his esteem. Hence, he easily accepted the unexpected delay in Loyal Heart's confession, and was grateful to Black-deer for arriving so opportunely.

At the moment when Dona Garillas left the room No Eusebio introduced the Indian chief by another door. Black-deer seemed suffering from a lively anxiety. The warrior's gloomy air, his frowns—nothing, in a word, recalled in him the man who had just contracted a union he had long desired, and which fulfilled all his wishes; his countenance, on the contrary, was so grave and stern, that the two hunters noticed it at the first glance.

"Wah!" Loyal Heart said, good-humoredly, "you have a preciously sad face. Did you, on entering the village, perceive five crows on your right, or did your scalping-knife stick in the ground thrice in succession, which as everybody knows, is a very evil omen?"

The chief, before replying, bent a piercing glance around.

"No," he at length said, in a low and suppressed voice, "Black-deer has not seen five crows on his right; he saw a fox on his left, and a flight of owls in the bushes."

"You know, chief, that I do not understand you," Loyal Heart said, laughing.

"Nor do I, on my honor," Tranquil observed, with a crafty smile.

The chief bravely endured this double volley of sarcasm. Not a muscle of his face stirred; on the

contrary, his features seemed to grow more gloomy.

"My brothers can laugh," he said; "they are pale-faces; they care little whether good or evil happens to the Indians."

"Pardon, chief," Loyal Heart answered, suddenly becoming serious; "my friend and myself had no intention of insulting you."

"I am aware of it," the chief replied; "my brothers cannot suppose that on a day like this I should be sad."

"That is true, but now our ears are open; my brother will speak, and we listen with all the attention his words deserve."

The Indian seemed to hesitate, but in a moment he walked up to Loyal Heart and Tranquil, seated by his side, and bent over them, so that his head touched theirs.

"The situation is grave," he said, "and I have only a few minutes to spare, so my brothers will listen seriously. Are my brothers listening?"

"We are listening," the two men answered with one voice.

"A great danger menaces the Antelope Comanches."

"How so, chief?"

"The Apaches are watching the neighborhood of the village. I have seen them."

"My brother has seen the Apaches?"

The chief smiled proudly.

"Yes," he said, "Black-deer is a great brave; he has the fine scent of my brother's rastros; he has smelt the enemy; smelling is seeing, with a warrior."

"Yes, but my brother must take care! passion is an evil counselor," Loyal Heart answered; "perhaps he is mistaken."

Black-deer shrugged his shoulders with disdain. "This night there was not a breath of air in the forest, yet the leaves of the trees moved, and the tall grass was agitated."

"Wah! that is astonishing," said Loyal Heart; "an envoy of the Buffalo Apaches is in the village at this moment, we must be threatened by fearful trickery."

"Blue-fox is a traitor who has sold his people," the Indian continued with some animation; "what can be hoped from such a man? he has come here to count the braves, and send the warriors to sleep."

"Yes," said Loyal Heart thoughtfully, "that is possible. But what is to be done? has my brother warned the chiefs?"

"Yes, while Blue-fox requested the hachesto to assemble the council, Black-deer spoke with Bounding Panther, Lynx, and Blackbird."

"Very good, what have they resolved?"

"Blue-fox will be retained as a hostage, under various pretexts. At sunset two hundred picked warriors, under the orders of Loyal Heart, and guided by Black-deer, will go and surprise the enemy, who, knowing their emissary to be in the village, will have no suspicion, but fall into the trap they intended to set for us."

Loyal Heart remained silent for a moment and reflected.

"Let my brother hear me," he said presently; "I am ready to obey the orders of the Sovereign Council of the Sachems of the tribe, but I will not let the warriors entrusted to me be massacred. The Buffalo Apaches are old chattering and crying squaws, without courage, to whom we will give soft coats, each time they find themselves face to face with us in the prairies. But here such is not the case; they are ambushed at a spot selected beforehand, and are acquainted with all its resources. However well my young men may be guided by my brothers, the Apaches will come on their trail, so that will not do."

"What does my brother propose?" Black-deer asked with some anxiety.

"The sun has run two-thirds of its course, Black-deer will warn the warriors to proceed each by himself, to the mountain of the Black-bear, one hour after sunset. In this way they will seem to be going hunting separately, and excite no suspicion. When the sun has disappeared on the horizon, in the sacred cavern of the Red Mountain, my brother the hunter and myself will mount our horses and join the red-skins. Have I spoken well? does what I have said please my brother?"

While Loyal Heart was thus explaining the plan he had instantaneously conceived, the Indian chief gave marks of the greatest joy, and the most lively admiration.

"My brother has spoken well," he answered; "the Wacondah is with him; his medicine is very powerful, though his hair is black; the wisdom of the Master of Life resides in him. It shall be done as he desires; Black-deer will obey him."

"Good; but my brother will take care: Blue-fox is very clever!"

"Blue-fox is an Apache dog, whose ears Black-deer will crop. My brother the hunter need not feel alarmed."

After exchanging a few more sentences to come to a full understanding, and make their final arrangements, Black-deer withdrew.

"You will come with me, I suppose, Tranquil?" the young man asked the Canadian so soon as they were alone.

"Of course!" the other replied; "what the deuce should I do here during your absence? I prefer accompanying you, especially as there will be a jolly row."

It is evident to me that the Apaches would not have ventured so near the village, unless they were in considerable force."

"Well, in that case, two hundred men are as nothing; you should have asked for more."

"Why so? In a surprise the man who attacks is always the stronger; we will try to get the first blow, that is all."

"That is true, by Jove! I am delighted at the affair; I have not smelled powder for some time, and feel myself beginning to rust; that will restore me."

At this outburst, Loyal Heart laughed.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO ENEMIES.

In the high American latitudes, night comes on suddenly, and without sensible transition; there is no twilight, and when the sun has disappeared on the horizon, it is perfect darkness.

the period of the year when the events occurred which we have undertaken to describe, the sun set at seven o'clock. Half an hour later Tranquil and Loyal Heart, mounted on excellent mustangs, left the rancho, followed by No Eusebio, who insisted on joining them. They had only gone a few yards across the square, however, when the Canadian laid his hand on the young man's bridle.

"What do you want?" the latter asked.

"Shall we not take our comrades with us?"

"Do you think it necessary?"

"Well, with the exception of the monk, who, I fear, is not worth much, they are stout fellows, whose rifles might prove useful to us."

"That is true; warn them in a few words, and rejoin me here."

"Do you not think the departure of so large a party may arouse the suspicions of Blue-fox, who is doubtless prowling about the neighborhood?"

"Not at all, they are white men; if he saw Indian warriors departing thus, I am sure his doubts would be aroused; but he will never suppose that hunters have discovered his treachery."

"You may be right, but in any case it is better to run the risk; wait for me, I shall be back in ten minutes."

"All right, go along."

Tranquil went off rapidly, while Loyal Heart and No Eusebio halted a few yards further on. The adventurers gleefully accepted the proposal Tranquil made them; for such men a battle is a festival, especially when they have Indians to fight; ten minutes scarce elapsed, ere the Canadian rejoined the young man. The little band set out, and silently left the village.

Loyal Heart was mistaken in supposing that Blue-fox would not be alarmed on seeing the white hunters leave the atepell. The red-skin had his eyes constantly upon the movements of the inhabitants of the village. Although the Comanche chiefs had acted with the greatest prudence, the Apache sachem speedily perceived that he was watched, and that, though honorably treated, and apparently free, he was in reality a prisoner. He pretended not to suspect what was going on, but redoubled his attention. During the past day, he had seen several warriors mount their horses one after the other, and set out in groups of two, three, and even four, to bury themselves in the forest.

Not one of these warriors having returned caused Blue-fox to suspect that his plans were discovered, and that the Comanches were attempting a counter-mine. The situation was growing very critical for him.

Blue-fox was a warrior renowned as much for his wisdom in council as for his bravery in fight; that is to say, Blue-fox, like a true red-skin, would never hesitate, when circumstances demanded it, to substitute craft and trickery for courage.

Blue-fox was sitting in front of the entrance of the calli of honor the Comanches had given him, calmly smoking his pipe, when the white hunters passed before him. He displayed neither surprise nor curiosity, but by an almost imperceptible movement of his head and shoulders, he looked after them with a flashing glance till they disappeared in the darkness. We have said that the night was dark, the village already appeared completely deserted, the Indians had already withdrawn to the interior of their callis, while at lengthened intervals an isolated red-skin hastily crossed the square, hurrying homeward.

Blue-fox still sat before his calli smoking; gradually the arm that supported the calumet fell on his knees, his head bowed on his chest, and the Apache sachem seemed, as so often happens to the Indians, to have yielded to the narcotic influence of the morichee; and a long time elapsed ere he made the slightest movement. His calm and regular breathing, and his careless attitude, led to the supposition that he had been overcome by sleep; but, if any sound suddenly smote his ear, an almost imperceptible tremor ran over his limbs, and his eyelash rose, probably through that instinct of personal prudence peculiar to the Indians. All at once the curtain of the calli was raised, and a hand was roughly laid on the sleeper's shoulder. The chief started at this touch, which he did not at all expect, and sprung up suddenly.

"The nights are cold," said an ironical voice, which smote unpleasantly on the ear of Blue-fox; "the dew is profuse, and ices the blood; my brother is wrong to sleep thus in the open air, when he has a comfortable calli."

Blue-fox, by a powerful effort, composed his features, and answered in the voice of a man who is really waking—

"I thank my brother," he said, "the nights are very cold, and it is better to sleep in a calli than in the open air."

He rose, and re-entered the hut with the calm step of a man delighted with the warning he has received. A great fire was kindled in the interior of the calli, which was also illumined by a torch of ocote wood stuck in the ground, whose ruddy glare imparted a blood-red hue to surrounding objects. The man whose advice surprised Blue-fox, let the curtain fall behind him, and entered after the chief. This man was Black-deer; without uttering a syllable, he sat down before the fire, and began arranging the logs with a certain degree of symmetry. Blue-fox gazed on him for a moment with an undefinable expression, and then walked up and stood by his side.

"My brothers, the Antelope Comanches," he said, with an almost imperceptible tinge of irony in his voice, "are great warriors; they understand the laws of hospitality better than any other nation."

"The Antelope Comanches," Black-deer answered, peaceably, "know that Blue-fox is a renowned chief, and one of the great braves of the Buffalo Apaches; they are anxious to do him honor."

The chief bowed.

"Does this honor go so far as to compel so great a warrior as my brother to watch over my sleep?"

"My brother is the guest of the Antelopes, and has a claim to all possible attention."

Like two experienced duelists the chiefs had crossed swords; having felt their blades, they perceived that they were of equal strength, and each fell back a step to continue the engagement on new ground.

"Then," Blue-fox continued, "my brother will remain in the calli with me."

The chief gave a nod of assent.

"Wah! I know for what reason the Comanche sachems treat me thus: they are aware that Black-deer and Blue-fox, though each adopted by a different tribe, are yet brothers of the great and powerful nation of the Snake Pawnees; hence they suppose that the two chiefs would be pleased to converse together and recall their early years. My brother will thank the sachems of his nation for Blue-fox; I was far from expecting so great a proof of courtesy on their part."

"My brother is rightly called the Fox," the Comanche replied, briefly, with a bitter accent; "his craft is great."

"What does my brother mean?" the Apache went on, with the greatest air of surprise he could assume.

"I speak the truth, and my brother is well aware of it," Black-deer answered; "why should we thus try to deceive each other? we have been too long acquainted. Let my brother listen to me: the Antelope Comanches are not, as the Apaches suppose them, inexperienced children, they know for what purpose my brother has come to their winter atepell."

"Ah," the chief said, "I hear a mocking-bird singing in my ears, but I do not at all understand what it means."

"Perhaps so, but to remove my brother's doubt I will speak to him frankly."

"Can my brother do so?" the Apache continued, ironically.

"The chief shall judge:—For some moons past the Buffalo Apaches have been trying to take a brilliant revenge on the Comanches for a defeat the warriors of my nation inflicted on them, but the Apaches are chattering old women who possess no craft; the Comanches will give them petticoats and send them to cut wood for them in the forests."

The chief's eyebrows were almost meeting at this crushing insult; a flash of fury burst from his eyes, but still he managed to overpower his feelings. He drew himself up with supreme majesty and folded himself in his buffalo-robe.

"My brother, Black-deer, forgets to whom he is speaking," he said; "Blue-fox is the envoy of his nation to the Comanches, he has sought shelter under the totem of the Antelopes and smoked their sacred calumet; his person must be respected."

"The Apache chief is mistaken," Black-deer replied, with a disdainful smile; "he is not the envoy of a brave nation, but only the spy of a pack of savage dogs. While Blue-fox tries to deceive the Comanche sachems, and lull them to sleep in a treacherous serenity, the Apache dogs are hidden like moles in the tall grass, awaiting the signal which will surrender their defenseless enemies into their hands."

Blue-fox looked round the calli, and bounding like a jaguar, rushed on his foeman, brandishing his knife.

"Die, dog!" he shouted.

Since the beginning of their singular conversation Black-deer had not stirred, he had remained tranquilly crouching over the fire, but his eyes had not lost one of the Apache's movements, and when the latter rushed madly at him he started aside, and springing up with extreme rapidity, seized the chief in his arms and both rolled on the ground, intertwined like serpents. In their fall they fell on the torch, which was extinguished; hence, the terrible and silent conflict went on between the two men by the uncertain gleam of the fire, each striving to stab his enemy. They were both of nearly the same age, their strength and skill were equal, and an implacable hatred animated both; in this horrible duel, which must evidently terminate in the death of one of them, they disdained the usual tricks employed in such fights, as they cared little about death so long as their enemy received the mortal blow simultaneously.

Still, Black-deer had a great advantage over his adversary, who, blinded by fury, and not calculating any of his movements, could not long sustain this deadly contest without himself becoming a victim to the insensate rage which had urged him to attack the Comanche. The latter, on the contrary, acted with the greatest coolness; he had seized his enemy, had pinned his arms and rendered it impossible for him to employ his weapon; all the efforts of Black-deer tended to roll the Apache into the fire burning in the center of the calli.

They had been wrestling thus for a long time when suddenly the curtain of the hut was raised, and a brilliant light inundated the interior. Several men entered; they were Comanche warriors. They arrived later than they should have done, for all that took place at this moment had been arranged beforehand between them and Black-deer. Five minutes later their interference would have been useless, as they would probably have found one of the two combatants killed by the other, or perhaps raised two corpses, such fury and vindictiveness were displayed in this atrocious struggle.

When Blue-fox saw the help that arrived for his enemy he judged the position at a glance, and felt that he was lost; still his cunning and coolness did not abandon him at this supreme moment; for red-skins, whatever may be the hatred they feel, do not kill an enemy who openly allows that he is conquered. The Apache chief, so soon as he perceived the Comanches, ceased his efforts, and removed the arms which had hitherto held Black-deer as in a vise; then, throwing back his head and closing his eyes, he stood motionless.

Blue-fox was aware that he would be regarded as a prisoner and kept for the stake of torture, but until the hour marked for his punishment arrived he retained the hope of escaping, with whatever care he might be guarded. This chance was the last left him, so he did not wish to lose it.

Black-deer rose, greatly shaken by the mad combat; but, instead of striking his enemy, who lay disarmed at his feet, he returned his knife to his belt. The Apache's calculations were correct; until the hour of punishment arrived he had nothing to fear from his enemy.

"Blue-fox is a great brave, he fought like a Comanche warrior," said Black-deer; "as he has not fought he will rise, and the Comanche chief will show him all the consideration he deserves."

And he offered him his hand to help him in rising. The Apache made no movement to pick up his weapons, but frankly accepted the offered hand and rose.

"The Comanche dogs will see a warrior die," he

said, with an ironical smile; "Blue-fox laughs at their tortures; they are not capable of making one of his muscles quiver."

"Good! my brother will see," and turning to the sachems, who stood motionless and silent a few paces off, the chief added: "when will this warrior die?"

"To-morrow at sunset," the most aged of the Indians laconically answered.

"Blue-fox does not fear death, but ere he goes to hunt on the happy hunting-grounds, beneath the powerful eye of the Wacouadah, he has several important matters to settle on this earth."

The Comanches bowed in assent.

"Blue-fox," the Apache chief continued, "has a necessity to return among the warriors of his nation."

"How long will the chief remain absent?"

"One whole moon."

"Good! What will the chief do to insure his word, and that the Comanche sachems may put faith in what he says?"

"Blue-fox will leave a hostage."

"The sachem of the Buffalo Apaches is a great brave; what warrior of his nation can die in his stead if he forget to liberate his pledge?"

"I will give the flesh of my flesh, the blood of my blood, the bone of my bone. My son will take my place."

The Comanches exchanged a very meaning glance. There was a rather lengthened silence, during which the Apache, haughtily folded in his buffalo robe, stoically waited, and it was impossible to read in his features the emotions that agitated him. At length Black-deer spoke again.

"My brother has recalled to my memory," he said, "the years of our youth, when we were both children of the Snake Pawnees, and hunted in company the elk and the asshata in the prairies of the Upper Missouri. The early years are the sweetest; the words of my brother made my heart tremble with joy. I will be kind to him; his son shall be his substitute, though he is still very young; but he knows how to crawl like the serpent and fly like the eagle, and his arm is strong in fight. But Blue-fox will reflect before pledging his word. If, on the evening of the twenty-eighth sun, my brother has not returned to take his place at the foot of the stake of torture, his son will die."

"I thank my brother," the Apache replied in a firm voice; "on the twenty-eighth sun I shall return; here is my open hand."

"And here is mine."

The two enemies clasped in cordial pressure the two hands which, a few minutes before, had been seeking so eagerly each other's life; then Blue-fox unfastened the cascabel skin that attached his long hair in the form of a cap on the top of his head, and removed the white eagle plume fixed above his right ear.

"My brother will lend me his knife," he said.

"My brother's knife is at his feet," the Comanche answered, cautiously; "so great a warrior must not remain unarmed. He can pick it up."

The chief stooped, picked up his knife, and thrust it in his girdle.

"Here is the plume of a chief," he said, as he gave it to Black-deer, cutting off a tress of the long hair, which, being no longer fastened, fell in disorder on his shoulders; he added, "My brother will keep this lock, it forms part of the scalp that belongs to him; the chief will come to ask it back on the appointed day and hour."

"Good!" the Comanche answered, taking the hair and the plume, "my brother will follow me."

The Comanches, unmoved spectators of this scene, shook their torches to revive the flame, and all the Indians leaving the calli, proceeded in the direction of the medicine-lodge, which stood, as we have seen, in the center of the square between the ark of the first man and the stake of torture. It was toward the latter that the chiefs proceeded with that slow and solemn step they employ in serious matters. As they passed in front of the calli the curtains were raised, the inhabitants came out holding torches, and followed the procession. When the chiefs reached the stake, an immense crowd filled the square, but it was silent and reflecting.

There was something strange and striking in the scenes offered at this moment by the square, under the light of the torches, whose flame the wind blew in all directions. The chiefs halted at the foot of the stake and formed a semicircle, in the center of which Blue-fox stationed himself.

"Now that my brother has given his pledge, he can summon his son," said Black-deer; "the lad is not far off, I dare say."

The Apache smiled cunningly.

"The young of the eagle always follows the powerful flight of its parent," he replied; "the warriors will part to the right and left to grant him a passage."

At a silent sign from Black-deer there was a movement in the crowd, which fell back and left a passage through the center; Blue-fox then thrust his fingers in his mouth, and imitated thrice the call of the hawk. In a few minutes a similar but very faint cry answered him. The chief renewed his summons and this time the answer was shriller and more distinct. For the third time the Apache repeated his signal, which was answered close at hand; the rapid gallop of a horse became audible, and almost immediately an Indian warrior dashed up at full speed. This warrior crossed the entire square without evidencing the slightest surprise. He stopped short at the foot of the stake, dismounted, and placed himself by the side of Blue-fox, to whom he merely said: "Here I am."

This warrior was the son of the Apache chief, a tall and nobly built lad of sixteen to seventeen. His features were handsome, his glance was haughty, his demeanor simple, and noble without boasting.

"This boy is my son," Blue-fox said to the Comanche chiefs.

"Good!" they replied, bowing courteously.

"Do you consent to remain as a hostage in place of your father?" Black-deer asked him.

The young man bowed his head in assent.

"You know that if your father does not come to liberate his pledge you will die in his place?"

A smile of contempt played round the boy's lips.

"I know it," he said.

"And you accept?"

"I do."

"Good!" the chief said.

He then went up to the stake and fastened to it the feather and lock of hair Blue-fox had given him.

"This feather and this hair will remain here until the man to whom they belong returns to claim them," he said.

The Apache chief answered in his turn: "I swear on my totem to come and redeem them at the appointed time."

"Wah! my brother is free," Black-deer continued; "here is the feather of a chief; it will serve him as a recognition if the warriors of my nation were to meet him. Still, my brother will remember that he is forbidden communicating in any way with the Braves of his nation ambushed round the village."

"Blue-fox will remember it."

After uttering these few words without even exchanging a look with his son, who stood motionless by his side, the chief took the feather Black-deer offered him, leaped on the horse which had brought the young man, and started at a gallop, not looking back once. When he had disappeared in the darkness, the chiefs went up to the boy, bound him securely, and confined him in the medicine-lodge, under the guardianship of several warriors.

"Now," said Black-deer, "for the others."

And mounting his horse in his turn, he left the village.

CHAPTER XV.

THE AMBUSCADE.

We have given a sufficiently detailed account of the village of the Antelope Comanches to be able to dispense with further reference to it; we will merely add that it was built in an oval shape, and descended with a gentle incline to the river. This position prevented the enemy surrounding the village, whose approaches were guarded from surprise by the trees having been felled for some distance.

Loyal Heart and his comrades advanced slowly, with their rides on their thigh, attentively watching the neighborhood, and ready, at the slightest suspicious movement in the tall grass, to execute a vigorous charge. All, however, remained quiet round them; at times they heard a coyote laying at the moon, or the noise of an owl concealed by the foliage; but that was all, and a leaden silence again fell on the savanna. At times they saw in the bluish rays of the moon indistinct forms appear on the banks of the river; but these wandering shadows were evidently wild beasts which had left their lurking places to come down and drink.

The march continued thus without incumbrance or alarm of any description, until the adventurers had reached the cover, when a dense gloom suddenly enveloped them, and did not allow them to distinguish objects ten yards ahead. Loyal Heart did not consider it prudent to advance further in a neighborhood he did not know, and where he saw the risk at each step of falling into an ambushade; consequently the little band halted. The horses were made to lie down on their side, their legs were fastened, and their nostrils drawn in with a rope, so that they could neither stir nor make a sound, and the adventurers, concealing themselves, waited while watching with the most profound attention.

From time to time they saw horsemen crossing a clearing, and all going in different directions; some passed close enough to touch them without perceiving the hunters, owing to the precautions the latter had taken, and then disappeared in the forest. Several hours passed thus, the hunters being quite unable to comprehend the delay, the reason for which the reader, however, knows; the moon had disappeared, and the darkness became denser. Loyal Heart, not knowing to what he should attribute Black-deer's lengthened absence, and fearing some unforeseen misfortune had burst on the village, was about to give the order for returning, when Tranquil, who, by crawling on his hands and knees, had reached the open plain where he remained for some time as scout, suddenly returned to his comrades.

"What is the matter?" Loyal Heart whispered in his ear.

"I cannot say," the hunter answered, "I do not understand it myself. About an hour back, an Indian suddenly sprang up by my side as if emerging from the ground, and leaping on a horse of whose presence I was equally ignorant, started at full speed in the direction of the village."

"That is strange," Loyal Heart muttered; "and you do not know who the Indian is?"

"Apache."

"Apache, impossible!"

"That is just the point that staggers me; how could an Apache venture to the village alone?"

"There is something up we do not know; and then the signals we heard?"

"This man answered them."

"What is to be done?"

"I find out."

"But in what way?"

"Why, hang it, by rejoining our friends."

Loyal Heart shook his head.

"No," he said, "we must employ some other method, for I promised Black-deer to help him in this expedition, and I will not break my word."

"It is evident that important events have occurred among the tribe."

"That is my opinion too, but you know the prudence of the Indians, so we will not despair yet; stay," he added, as he tapped his forehead, "I have an idea, we shall soon know what is taking place; leave me to act."

"Do you require our help?"

"Not positively; I shall not go out of sight, but if you see me in danger, come up."

"All right."

Loyal Heart took a long rope of plaited leather, which served him as a picquet cord, and laying down his rifle, which might have impeded him in the execution of the daring plan he had formed, lay down on the ground and crawled away like a serpent. The plain was covered with dead trees and enormous stones, while there were wide trenches at certain spots. This open ground, so singularly broken up, offered, therefore, all the facilities desirable for forming an ambushade or a post of observation.

Loyal Heart stopped behind an enormous block of red granite, whose height enabled him to stand up, in shelter on all sides save in the direction of the forest. But he had no great risk to run from any enemies concealed in the chaparral, for the night was so

dark that it would have been necessary to have followed the hunter's every movement, to discover the spot where he now was.

Loyal Heart was a Mexican; like all his countrymen, whose skill is proverbial in the management of certain weapons, from his youth he had been familiarized with the lasso, that terrible arm which renders the Mexican horsemen so formidable.

Loyal Heart had the simple idea of forming a running knot at the end of his picquet-rope, and lassoing the first rider who passed within reach. On retreating behind the rock he unrolled the long cord he had fastened round his body; then, after making the slip-knot with all the care it demands, he coiled the lasso in his hand and waited. Chance seemed to favor the project of the bold hunter, for, within ten minutes at the most, he heard the gallop of a horse going at full speed. Loyal Heart listened attentively; the sound approached with great rapidity, and soon the black outline of a horseman stood out in the night. The direction followed by the rider compelled him to pass within a short distance of the block of granite behind which Loyal Heart was concealed. The latter spread out his legs to have a firmer holdfast, bent his body slightly forward, and whirled the lasso round his head. At the moment when the horseman came opposite to him, Loyal Heart let the lasso fly, and it fell with a whiz on the shoulders of the rider, who was roughly hurled to the ground ere he knew what was happening to him. His horse, which was at full speed, went on some distance further, but then perceiving that its rider had left it, it slackened its pace, and presently halted.

In the mean while Loyal Heart bounded like a tiger on the men he had so suddenly unsaddled. The latter had not uttered a cry, but remained motionless at the spot where he had been hurled. Loyal Heart at first fancied him dead, but it was not so; his first care was to free the wounded man from the running knot, drawn so tightly round his neck, in order to enable him to breathe; then, without taking the trouble to look at his victim, he pinioned him securely, threw him over his shoulders, and returned to the spot where his comrades were awaiting him.

The latter had seen, or at least heard, what had happened; and far from dreaming of the means employed by the young man, although they were well acquainted with it, they knew not to what they should attribute the rough way in which the rider had been hurled from his horse.

"Oh, oh," Tranquil said, "I fancy you have made a fine capture."

"I think so too," Loyal Heart answered, as he deposited his burden on the ground.

"How on earth did you manage to unsaddle him so cleverly?"

"Oh! in the simplest way possible. I lassoed him."

"By Jove!" the hunter exclaimed, "I suspected it. But let us see the nature of the game. These confounded Indians are difficult to tame when they take it into their heads not to unlock their teeth. This fellow will not speak, in all probability."

"Who knows? At any rate, we can question him."

"Yes—but let us first make sure of his identity, for it would not be pleasant to have captured one of our friends."

"May the Lord forbid!" Loyal Heart said.

The hunters bent over the prisoner, who was apparently motionless, and indifferent to what was said around.

"Oh," the Canadian suddenly said, "whom have we here? On my soul, compadre, I believe it is an old acquaintance."

"You are right," Loyal Heart answered; "it is Blue-fox."

"Blue-fox?" the hunters exclaimed, in surprise.

The adventurers were not mistaken; the Indian horseman, so skillfully lassoed by Loyal Heart, was really the Apache chief. The shock he had received, though very rude, had not been sufficiently so to make him entirely lose his senses; with open eyes and disdainful countenance, but with not a word of complaint at the treatment he had suffered, he waited calmly till it should please his captors to decide his fate, not considering it consistent with his dignity to be the first to speak. After examining him attentively for a moment, Loyal Heart unfastened the bonds that held him, and fell back a step.

"My brother can rise," he said; "only old women remain thus stretched on the ground for an insignificant fall."

Blue-fox reached his feet at a bound.

"The chief is no old woman," he said; "his heart is large; he laughs at the anger of his enemies, and despises their fury."

"We are not your enemies, chief; we feel no hatred or anger toward you; it is you, on the contrary, who are our enemy. Are you disposed to answer our questions?"

"I could refrain from doing so, were it my good pleasure."

"I do not think so," John Davis remarked, with a grin, "for we have wonderful secrets to untie the tongues of those we cross-question."

"Try them on me," the Indian observed, haughtily.

"We shall see," said the American.

"Stop!" said Loyal Heart; "there is in all this something extraordinary, which I wish to discover, so leave it to me."

"As you please," said John Davis.

The adventurers collected round the Indian, and waited anxiously.

"How is it," Loyal Heart presently went on, "that you, who were sent by the Apaches to treat for peace with the Comanches, were thus leaving the village in the middle of the night, not as a friend, but as a robber flying after the commission of a theft?"

The chief smiled contemptuously, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should I tell you what has passed? It would be uselessly losing precious time; suffice it for you to know that I left the village with the general consent of the chiefs, and if I was galloping, it was probably because I was in a hurry to reach the spot I am bound for."

"Hum!" said the hunter; "you will permit me to remark, chief, that your answer is very vague, and anything but satisfactory."

"It is the only one, however, I am enabled to give you."

"And do you fancy we shall be satisfied with it?"

"You must."

"Perhaps so, but listen; we are awaiting Black-deer at every moment, and he shall decide your fate."

"As it pleases the pale hunter. When the Comanche chief arrives, my brother will see that the Apache sachem has spoken truly, that his tongue is not forked, and that the words that come from his lips are sincere."

"I hope so."

At this moment the signal agreed on between Black-deer and the hunters was heard; the hunter said at once to the prisoner:

"Here is the chief."

"Good," the latter simply answered.

Five minutes later the sachem reached the spot where the adventurers were assembled. His first glance fell on the Apache, standing upright with folded arms in the circle formed by the hunters.

"What is Blue-fox doing here?" he asked, in surprise.

"The chief can ask the pale warriors, they will answer," said the Apache.

Black-deer turned to Loyal Heart; the latter, not waiting till he was addressed, related what had occurred. Black-deer seemed to reflect for a moment.

"Why did not my brother show the sign of recognition I gave him?" he asked.

"For what good, as my brother was coming?"

The Comanche frowned.

"My brother will be careful to remember that he has passed his word, and the mere appearance of treachery will cost his son's life."

A shudder passed over the Indian's body, although his features lost none of their marble-like rigidity.

"Blue-fox has sworn on his totem," he replied; "that oath is sacred, and he will keep it."

"Enough! my brother is free, he can go."

"I must find my horse again which has escaped."

"Does my brother take us for children, that he says such things to us?" Black-deer replied angrily.

"The horse of an Indian chief never abandons its master; let him whistle, and it will come up."

Blue-fox made no reply; his black eye shot forth a flash of fury, but that was all; he bent forward, seemed to be listening for a few moments, and then gave a shrill whistle, almost immediately after which there was a rustling in the branches, and the chief's horse laid its fine and intelligent head on its master's shoulder. The latter patted the noble animal, leaped on its back, and digging in his spurs, started at full speed without taking further leave of the hunters, who were quite startled by this hurried departure. John Davis, by an instinctive movement swift as thought, raised his rifle, with the evident intention of saluting the fugitive with a bullet, but Black-deer suddenly clutched his arm.

"My brother must not fire," he said; "the sound would betray our presence."

"That is true," the American said, as he took down his gun. "It is unlucky, for I should have been very glad to get rid of that scoundrel."

"My brother will find him again," said the Indian with an accent impossible to describe.

"I hope so, and if it should happen, I assure you that no one will be able to prevent me killing that reptile."

"No one will try to do so, my brother may rest assured."

"Nothing less than that certainly was needed to console me for the magnificent opportunity you made me lose, chief."

The Indian laughed, and continued:

"I will explain to you at another moment how it happens that this man is free to retire in peace. For the present, let us not lose precious time in idle talk, for all is ready. My warriors are at their post, only awaiting the signal to begin the contest; do my pale brothers still intend to accompany us?"

"Certainly, chief, we are here for that purpose, you can count upon us."

"Good, still I must warn my brothers that they will run a great risk."

"Nonsense," Loyal Heart replied, "it will be welcome, for are we not accustomed to danger?"

"Then to horse, and let us start, as he have to deceive the deceivers."

"But are you not afraid," Loyal Heart observed, "lest Blue-fox has warned his comrades that their tricks are discovered?"

"No, he cannot do so, he has sworn it."

The hunters did not insist further, they knew with what religious exactness Indians keep oaths they make to each other, and the good faith and loyalty they display in the accomplishment of this duty. The chief's answer convinced them that they had nothing to apprehend from the Apache sachem, and, in truth, he had gone off in a direction diametrically opposite to that where his companions were hidden.

The horses were released and the party set out. They followed a narrow path running between two ravines covered with thick grass. This path, after running for a mile and a half, debouched on a species of cross-roads, where the adventurers had halted for an instant. This spot called by the Indians the Elk Pass, had been selected by Black-deer as the gathering place of some forty picked warriors, who were to join the white men and act with them. This junction was effected as the sachem arranged. The hunters had hardly debouched at the cross-roads, ere the Comanches emerged from behind the thicket which had hitherto concealed them, and flocked up to Black-deer.

The band was formed in close column, and flankers went ahead, preceding it but a few yards, and attentively examining the thickets. For many an hour they marched on, nothing attracting their attention, when suddenly a shot was fired in the rear of the band. Almost simultaneously, as if at a given signal, the fusillade broke out on both sides the war-path, and a shower of bullets and arrows hurled upon the Comanches and white men. Several men fell, and there was a momentary confusion, inseparable from an unforeseen attack.

By assent of Black-deer, Loyal Heart assumed the supreme command. By his orders, the warriors broke up into platoons, and vigorously returned the fire, while retreating to the cross-roads, where the enemy could not attack them without discovering themselves; but they had committed the imprudence

of marching too fast—the cross-roads were still a long way off, and the fire of the Apaches extended along the whole line. The bullets and arrows rained on the Comanches, whose ranks were beginning to be thinned.

Loyal Heart ordered the ranks to be broken, and men to scatter. The cavalry at once tried to leap the ravines and ditches that bordered the path behind which the Apaches were hidden; but were repulsed by the long-barbed arrows, which the Indians fired with extreme dexterity. The Comanches and whites leaped off their horses, being certain of recovering them when wanted, and retreated, sheltering themselves behind trees, only giving way inch by inch, and keeping up a sustained fire with their enemies, who, feeling certain of victory, displayed in their attack a perseverance far from common among savage nations, with whom success nearly always depends on the first effort.

Loyal Heart, as soon as his men reached the clearing, made them form a circle, and they offered an imposing front to the enemy on all sides. Up to this moment, the Apaches had maintained silence, not a single war-yell had been uttered, not a rustling of the leaves had been heard. Suddenly the firing ceased, and silence again brooded over the desert. The hunters and Comanches looked at each other with a surprise mingled with terror. They had fallen into the trap their enemies had laid for them, while fancying they could spoil it.

There was a terrible moment of expectation, whose anxious expression no pen could depict. All at once the conchs and chichikoues were heard sounding on the right and left, in the rear and front! At this signal, the Apaches rose on all sides, blowing their war-whistles to excite their courage, and uttering fearful yells. The Comanches were surrounded, and nothing was left them but to die bravely at their posts! At this terrible sight, a shudder of fear involuntarily rose along those intrepid warriors, but it was almost instantaneously quelled, for they felt that their destruction was imminent and certain.

Loyal Heart and Black-deer, however, had lost none of their calmness; they hoped then, still, but what was it they expected?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SCALP-DANCE.

LOYAL HEART was as calm and quiet as if witnessing an ordinary charge; with flashing eye and haughty lip he recommended his warriors to save their powder and arrows, to keep together and sustain the charge of the Apaches, without yielding an inch of ground. The Comanches uttered their war-yell twice, and then a deadly silence brooded over the clearing.

"Good!" the hunter said, "you are great braves; I am proud of commanding such intrepid warriors. Your squaws will greet you with dances and shouts of joy on your return to the village, and proudly count the scalps you bring back at your girdle."

After this brief address the hunter returned to the center of the circle, and the whites waited with their fingers on the trigger, the red-skins with leveled bows. In the mean while the Apaches had quitted their ambuscade, had formed their ranks, and were marching in excellent order on the Comanches. They had also dismounted for a hand-to-hand fight was about to begin between these irreconcilable enemies.

The night had entirely slipped away; but the first beams of day, which tinged the tops of the trees, the black and moving circle could be seen drawing closer and closer round the weak group formed by the Comanches and the adventurers. It was a singular thing in prairie fashions that Apaches advanced slowly without firing, as if wishing to destroy their enemies at one blow. Tranquil and Loyal Heart shook hands while exchanging a calm smile.

"We have five minutes left," said the hunter.

"We shall settle a goodly number before falling ourselves," the Canadian answered.

Loyal Heart stretched out his hand toward the north-west.

"All is not over yet," he said.

"Do you hope to get us out of this scrape?"

"I intend," the young man answered, still calm and smiling, "to destroy this collection of brigands to the last man."

"May Heaven grant it!" the Canadian said, with a doubtful shake of the head.

The Apaches were now but a few yards off, and all the rifles were leveled as if by common agreement.

"Listen!" Loyal Heart muttered in Tranquil's ear.

At the same moment distant yells were heard, and the enemy stopped with alarmed hesitation.

"What is it?" Tranquil asked.

"Our men," the young man answered laconically. A sound of horses and fire-arms was heard in the enemy's rear.

"The Comanches! the Comanches!" the Apaches shouted.

The line that surrounded the little band was suddenly rent asunder, and two hundred Comanche horsemen were seen cutting down and crushing every foeman within reach. On perceiving their brothers the horsemen uttered a shout of joy, to which the others enthusiastically responded, for they had fancied themselves lost.

Loyal Heart had calculated justly, he had not been a second wrong; the warriors ambuscaded by Black-deer to effect a diversion and complete the victory arrived at the decisive moment. This was the secret of the young chief's calmness, although in his heart he was devoured by anxiety, for so many things might delay the arrival of the detachment. The Apaches, thus taken by surprise, attempted for a few minutes a desperate resistance; but being surrounded and overwhelmed by numbers, they soon began flying in all directions. But Black-deer's measures had been taken with great prudence, and a thorough knowledge of the military tactics of the prairies: the Apaches were literally caught between two fires.

Nearly two-thirds of the Apache warriors, placed under the command of Blue-fox to attempt the daring stroke he had conceived, fell, and the rest had great difficulty in escaping. The victory was decisive, and for a long time the Apaches would not dare to measure themselves again with their redoubtable enemies. Eight hundred horses and nearly five

hundred scalps were the trophies of the battle, without counting some thirty wounded. The Comanches had only lost a dozen warriors, and their enemies had been unable to scalp them, which was regarded as a great glory. The horses were collected, the dead and wounded placed on litters, and when all the scalps had been lifted from the Apaches who had succumbed during the fight, their bodies were left to the wild beasts, and the Comanche warriors, intoxicated with joy and pride, remounted their horses and returned to the village.

The return of the expeditionary corps was a perfect triumphant march. Black-deer, to do honor to Loyal Heart and his comrades, whose help had been so useful during the battle, insisted on their marching at the head of the column, and on Loyal Heart keeping by his side, as having shared the command with him. The sun rose at the moment when the Comanches emerged from the forest, the day promised to be magnificent, and the birds perched on all the branches loudly saluted the advent of day. A large crowd, composed of women and children, could be seen running from the village and hurrying to meet the warriors.

A large band of horsemen soon appeared, armed and painted for war, at their head marching the greatest braves and most respected sachems of the tribe. This band, formed in good order, came up to the sound of conchs, drums, chichikoues, and war whistles, mingled with shouts of joy from the crowd. On coming within a certain distance of each other, the two bands halted, while the crowd fell back to the right and left. Then, at a signal given by Black-deer and the chief commanding the second detachment, a fearful yell burst forth like a clap of thunder, the horsemen dug in their spurs, and the two parties rushed upon one another and began a series of evolutions.

When this performance had lasted some time, and a considerable quantity of gunpowder had been expended, the two chiefs gave a signal, and the bands, up to the present commingled, separated, as if by enchantment, and formed about a pistol-shot from each other. There was then a perfect rest, but in a few minutes, at a signal from Blackbird, the leaders of the two detachments advanced toward each other. The salutations and congratulations then began; for, as we have already made the observation, the Indians are excessively strict in matters of etiquette.

Black-deer was obliged to narrate in the fullest detail, to the assembled chiefs, how the action had been fought, the number of the enemy killed, how many had been scalped—in short, all that had occurred. Black-deer performed this duty with the utmost nobility and modesty, giving to Loyal Heart, who in vain protested, all the merit of the victory, and only allowing himself credit for having punctually carried out the orders the pale warrior had given him. This modesty in a warrior so renowned as Black-deer greatly pleased the Comanche chiefs, and obtained him the most sincere praise.

When all these preliminary ceremonies had been performed, the wives of the chiefs advanced, each leading by the bridle a magnificent steed, destined to take the place of their husbands' chargers wearied in action. Black-deer's young and charming squaw led two. After bowing with a gentle smile to her husband, and handing him the bridle of one of the horses, she turned gracefully to Loyal Heart, and offered him the bridle of the second horse.

"My brother Loyal Heart is a great brave," she said, in a voice as melodious as a bird's song; "he will permit his sister to offer him this courser, which is intended to take the place of the one he has tired in fighting to save his brothers."

All the Indians applauded this gift, so gracefully offered; Black-deer, in spite of his assumed stoicism, could not refrain from evidencing the pleasure which his young wife's charming attention caused him. Loyal Heart smiled sweetly, dismounted, and walked up to her.

"My sister is fair and kind," he said, as he kissed her on the forehead; "I accept the present she makes me; my brother Black-deer is happy in possessing so charming a squaw."

The young wife withdrew, all confused and delighted, among her companions; the chiefs then returned to the head of the detachment, and the two bands advanced slowly toward the village, escorted by the crowd which incessantly filled the air with joyous shouts that mingled with the musical instruments, whose savage harmony deafened all ears.

The Apache prisoners, on foot and disarmed, marched at the head of the column, guarded by fifty picked warriors. These untamable Indians, although perfectly aware of the fate that awaited them and the tortures to which they were destined, walked with head erect and haughty demeanor, as if, instead of being interested actors in the scene that was preparing, they were only indifferent spectators.

However, this stoicism peculiar to the red race surprised nobody. The Comanche warriors disdained to insult the misfortunes of the intrepid warriors, whose courage fortune had betrayed; the women alone, more cruel than the men, especially those whose husbands were killed in the battle, and whose bodies were now brought along in litters, rushed like furies on the unhappy prisoners, whom they overwhelmed with insults, casting stones and filth, and even at times trying to dig their sharp nails into their flesh. This was carried to such a point that the guards of the prisoners were compelled to interfere to prevent them being torn asunder alive, and get them away from the fury of these Megeras, who grew more and more excited, and in whom wrath had gradually attained the proportions of indescribable fury.

The procession, compelled to clear its way through a crowd that was momentarily augmented, only advanced slowly.

The day was far spent when it reached the palisade that formed the village defenses. At about ten paces from the palisade the two bands stopped; two men were standing motionless at the entrance of the village—they were the master of the great medicine and the hachesto; as if by enchantment, at the sight of these men a profound silence fell on the crowd so noisy a moment previously. The hachesto held in his hand the totem of the tribe, and when the warriors halted the sorcerer took a step forward.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked, in a loud voice.

"We are," Black-deer answered, "the great braves of the powerful nation of the Antelope Comanches; we ask leave to enter the village with our prisoners and the horses we have captured, in order to perform the scalp-dance round the stake of torture."

"Good," the sorcerer answered; "I recognize you; you are, indeed, the great braves of my nation; your hands are red with the blood of our enemies; but," he added, taking a gloomy glance around, "all our warriors are not present; what has become of those who are missing?"

There was a moment of mournful silence at this question.

"Answer," the sorcerer continued, imperiously; "have you abandoned your brothers?"

"No," Black-deer said; "they are dead, it is true, but we have brought back their bodies with us, and their scalps are untouched."

"Good," said the sorcerer; "how many warriors have fallen?"

"Only ten."

"How did they die?"

"Like brave men, with their face turned to their foe."

"Good; the Wacondah has received them into the happy hunting-grounds; have their squaws bewailed them?"

"They are doing so."

The seer frowned.

"Brave men only weep with tears of blood," he said.

Black-deer fell back a step to make room for the widows, who stood motionless and gloomy behind them; they then advanced.

"We are ready," they said; "if our father will permit us, we will bewail our husbands as they deserve."

"Do so," he answered; "the Master of Life sees it, and he will smile on your grief."

Then, a strange scene occurred, which only Indian stoicism could endure without shuddering with horror; these women, arming themselves with knives, cut off several joints of their fingers without uttering a complaint; then, not contented with this sacrifice, they began scarring their faces, arms, and bosoms, so that the blood soon ran down their whole bodies, and they became horrible to look upon. The seer excited and encouraged them by his remarks to give their husbands the proof of their regret, and their exaltation soon attained such a pitch of delirium, that they would eventually have killed themselves, had not the sorcerer checked them. Their companions then approached them, took away their weapons, and dragged them off. When they had finally left the spot, the sorcerer addressed the warriors standing motionless and attentive before him—

"The blood shed by the Apache warriors has been ransomed by the Comanche squaws," he said; "the ground is saturated with it; grief can now give way to joy, and my brothers enter their village with heads erect, for the Master of Life is satisfied."

Then taking from the hands of the bachesto the totem which the latter had been waving round his head, he stationed himself on the right hand of Black-deer, and entered the village with the warriors, amid the deafening shouts of the crowd, and to the sound of the instruments which had recommenced their infernal charivari.

The procession marched straight to the great square where the scalp-dance was to take place. Loyal Heart and his comrades desired most eagerly to escape this ceremony; but it would have been a great insult to the Indians to do so, and they were compelled to follow the warriors, whether they liked it or not. On passing before the hunter's rancho, they noticed that all the windows were closed. Dona Jesuita, not at all desirous to witness the cruel sight, had shut herself up; but No Eusebio, whose nerves were stronger, was standing in the doorway, carelessly smoking his cigarette, and watching the procession defile, which, by Loyal Heart's orders, he had preceded by a few moments, in order to reassure Dona Jesuita as to the result of the engagement.

When the whole tribe had assembled on the square, the scalp-dance commenced. It is performed by the squaws, and on this occasion it was Black-deer's newly-married wife who led the dance, in her quality of squaw of the chief who had commanded the expedition.

The Apache prisoners had been fastened to stakes erected expressly; and for some hours they were exposed to the ridicule, jests, and insults of their enemies without displaying the slightest emotion. When the dance at length ended, the time for torture arrived.

We will not dwell on the frightful sufferings inflicted on the wretched men whom their evil destiny had delivered into the hands of their implacable foes, for we have no desire to describe horrible scenes; we have even felt a repugnance to allude to them, but are bound to be faithful historians. As we have undertaken the task of making known the manners of races hitherto almost unknown, and which are destined so shortly to disappear, we will not fail in our duty, and in order that our readers may thoroughly understand what Indian torture is, we will describe the punishment inflicted on one of the prisoners, a renowned Apache chief.

This chief was a young man of five-and-twenty at the most, of lofty and well-proportioned stature; his features were noble, and his glance stern, and though severely wounded in the action, it was only when literally overwhelmed by numbers, that he had fallen upon the pile of his warriors who had died gravely at his side.

The Comanches, who are judges of courage, had admired his heroic conduct, and treated him with a certain degree of respect by the express orders of Black-deer, who entertained a hope of making him renounce his nation, and consent to be adopted by the Comanches, for whom so brave a warrior would have been an excellent acquisition. My readers must not feel surprised at this idea of the Comanche sachem; these adoptions are frequent among the red-skins, and it often happens that a warrior who has fallen into the power of his enemies, ransoms his life, and escapes torture by marrying the widow of the warrior he has killed, under the promise of bringing up the children of the deceased as his own.

The Apache chief was called Running-elk. Instead of fastening him to the stake like the warriors of

less value made prisoners at the same time as himself, he had been left at liberty. He was leaning his shoulder against the stake with folded arms, and watched calmly and disdainfully all the incidents of the scalp-dance. When it was ended, Black-deer, who had previously consulted with the other chiefs of the tribe, and communicated his idea, which they warmly approved of, walked up to him. The prisoner let him come up without seeming to notice him.

"My brother, Running-elk, is a renowned chief and great brave," he said to him in a gentle voice; "what is he thinking of at this moment?"

"I am thinking," the Apache answered, "that I shall soon be on the happy hunting-grounds, where I shall hunt by the side of the Master of Life."

"My brother is still very young, his life only counts spring seasons, does he not regret losing it?"

"Why should I regret it? a man must die after all."

"Certainly; but dying thus at the stake of torture, when you have a long future of joy and happiness before you, is hard."

The chief shook his head mournfully and interrupted the speaker.

"My brother need say no more," he replied; "I see his thoughts, he is indulging in a hope which will not be realized; Running-elk will not be a renegade to his nation to become a Comanche; I could not live among you, for the blood of your warriors I have shed would constantly cry out against me. Could I marry all the squaws whom my tomahawk has rendered widows, or give you back the numerous scalps I have raised? no, I could not. When an Apache and Comanche meet on the war-trail, one must kill the other. Cease then making me proposals which are an insult to my character and courage; fasten me to the stake of torture, and do not kill me at once, but gradually, by tortures, in the Indian way. Invent the most atrocious torture, and I defy you to hear from me a complaint, or even a sigh." And growing more excited as he spoke, he said, "You are children who do not know how to make a man of courage suffer, you need the death of a brave to learn how to die. Try it on me, I despise you; you are cowardly dogs, you can only snarl, and the mere sight of my eagle-feather has ever sufficed to put you to flight."

On hearing these haughty words, the Comanches uttered a yell of anger, and prepared to rush on the prisoner, but Black-deer checked them.

"Running-elk," he said, "is not a real brave, he talks too much; he is a mocking-bird, who chatters because he is afraid."

The sachem shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"This is the last word you shall hear from me," he said; "you are dogs!"

And, biting his tongue off, he spat it into Black-deer's face. The latter gave a leap of fury, and his rage knew no bounds. Running-elk was immediately fastened to the stake; the women then tore out the nails from his fingers and toes, and drove into the wounds little spiles of wood dipped in inflammable matter, which they fired. The Indian remained calm; no contraction of the muscles disturbed the harmony of his features. The punishment endured three hours; but, though his body was one huge wound, the sachem remained perfectly stoical. Blackbird approached in his turn.

"Wait," he said.

Room was made for him; rushing on the Apache, he plucked out his eyes, which he threw away with disgust, and filled the two burning cavities with live coals. This last agony was horrible; a nervous tremor ran for a second over the wretch's body, but that was all. The Comanche, exasperated by his stoicism, which he could not refrain from admiring, seized him by his long hair and scalped him; then he lashed his face with the blood-dripping scalp. The prisoner was horrible to look on, but still remained erect and unmoved.

Loyal Heart could no longer endure this hideous spectacle; he dashed through the people in front of him, and, putting a pistol to the prisoner's forehead, blew out his brains. The Comanches furious at seeing their vengeance slip from them, gave a start, as if about to rush on the white man who had dared to rob them of their prey; but the latter drew himself up haughtily, folded his arms on his chest, and looked them full in the face.

"Well," he said, in a firm voice.

This one word was enough; the wild beasts were muzzled; they fell back cursing, but did not attempt to make him account for what he had done. The hunter then made a sign to the adventurers to follow him, and they left the square, where for some hours longer the Indians wreaked their fury on the hapless prisoners.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MEETING.

We must now go back two months in our narrative, and leaving the deserts of Upper Arkansas for the banks of the Rio Trinidad, return to Cerro Pardo, in the vicinity of Galveston, on the very day of the battle so fatal to the Texans, in order to tell the reader the fate of certain important personages whom we have neglected too long.

We have said that the Jaguar, when he saw the battle irretrievably lost, rushed at full speed to the spot where he had left the cart, in which were Tranquil and Carmela; that, on reaching it, a frightful spectacle struck his sight; the cart, half broken, was lying on the ground surrounded by a majority of his friends, who had bravely fallen in its defense; but it was empty, and the two persons to whose safety he attached such importance had disappeared. The Jaguar, crushed by this horrible catastrophe, which he was so far from anticipating after the precautions he had taken, fell senseless to the ground, uttering a loud cry of despair.

The young man remained unconscious for several hours; but his was a nature which a blow, however terrible it might be, could not destroy thus. At the moment when the sun was disappearing on the horizon in the ocean, and making way for night, the Jaguar opened his eyes. He looked round haggardly, not being able to comprehend the position in which he found himself, and the circumstances owing to which he had fallen in such a strange state of prostration. However strong a man may be, however great the energy with which nature has endowed him, when life has been ruptured in him for

several hours, the recollection of past facts completely fails him for a period, more or less long, and he requires some minutes to restore order in his ideas. This was what happened to the young man; he was alone, a sorrowful silence prevailed around him, gloom was gradually invading the landscape, and the objects by which he was surrounded became with each moment less distinct.

Still the atmosphere was impregnated by a warm, sickly odor of carnage, and corpses covered the ground here and there. He saw the dark outline of the wild beasts, which darkness drew from their lairs, and which, guided by their sanguinary instinct, were already prowling about the battle-field, preparing to commence their horrible repast.

"Oh!" the young man suddenly exclaimed, leaping up, "I remember!"

We have said that the plain was deserted; nothing remained but corpses and wild beasts.

"What is to be done?" the Jaguar muttered; "whither shall I go? What has become of my brothers? In what direction have they fled? Where shall I find Carmela and Tranquil again?"

And the young man, crushed by the flood of desperate thoughts that rose from his heart to his brain, sunk on a block of rock, and, paying no further attention to the wild beasts, whose roars increased at each second, and grew more menacing with the darkness, he buried his head in his hands, and violently pressing his temples as if to retain that reason which was ready to abandon him, he reflected.

Two hours passed thus—two hours, during which he was a prey to a desperation which was the more terrible, as it was silent. This man, who had set all his hopes on an idea, who had for several years fought, without truce or mercy, for the realization of his dream, whose life had been, so to speak, one long self denial—at the moment when he was about to attain that object, had seen, by a sudden change of fortune, his projects annihilated forever perhaps, in a few hours. For a moment he had thought of finishing with life, plunging his dagger into his heart, and not surviving the downfall of his hopes of love and ambition. But this cowardly thought did not endure long. A sudden reaction took place in the young man's mind, and he rose again, stronger than before, for his soul, purified in the crucible of suffering, had resumed all its audacious energy.

"No," he said, casting a glance of defiance around, "I will not let myself be any longer crushed, God will not permit that a cause so sacred as that to which I have devoted myself should fail; it is a trial He has wished to impose on us, and I will endure it without complaint; though conquered to-day, tomorrow we will be victors. To work! Liberty is the daughter of Heaven; she is holy, and cannot die."

After uttering these words in a loud voice, with an accent of inspiration, as if desirous of giving those who had fallen a last and supreme consolation, the young man picked up his rifle, which had fallen by his side, and went off with the firm and assured step of a strong man, who has really faith in the cause he defends, and to whom obstacles, however great they may be, are incitements to persevere in the path he has traced. The Jaguar then crossed the battle-field, striding over the corpses, and putting to flight the wild beasts, which eagerly got out of the way.

The young man thus passed alone and in the darkness along the road he had traversed by the dazzling sunlight in the midst of an enthusiastic army, which marched gayly into action, and believed itself sure of victory. His resolution did not break down for a moment, he no longer allowed the attacks of those sad thoughts which had so nearly crushed him; he had clutched his sorrow, struggled with it and conquered it; now, nothing more could overpower him.

On reaching the end of the plain where the battle had been fought, the Jaguar halted. The moon had risen, and its sickly rays sadly illumined the landscape, to which it imparted a sinister hue. The young man looked around him; in his utter ignorance of the road followed by the fugitives of his party, he hesitated about going along a path where he ran a risk of falling in with a party of Mexican scouts or plunderers, who must at this moment be scouring the plain in every direction, in pursuit of those Texans who had been so lucky as to escape from the battle-field.

It was a long and difficult journey to the Fort of the Point, and in all probability the victors, if they were not already masters of the fortress, would have invested it, so as to intercept all communications of the garrison with their friends outside, and force it to surrender. Nor could he dream of entering Galveston, for that would be delivering himself into the hands of his enemies. The Jaguar's perplexity was great; he remained thus for a long time hesitating as to what road he should follow. By a mechanical movement habitual enough to men when embarrassed, he looked vaguely around him, though not fixing his eyes more on one spot than another, when he gave a sudden start. He had seen, some distance off, a faint, almost imperceptible light gleaming among the trees. The young man tried in vain to determine the direction in which the light was; but at length he felt certain that it came from the side where was the rancho, which on the previous evening had been the head-quarters of the staff of the Texan army.

This rancho, situated on the sea-shore, at a considerable distance from the battle-field, could not have been visited by the Mexicans, for their horses were too tired to carry them so far; the Jaguar therefore persuaded himself that the light he perceived was kindled by fugitives of his party; he believed it the more easily because he desired it, for night was advancing, and he had neither eaten or drunk during the past day, in which he had been so actively occupied; he began to feel not only exhausted with fatigue, but his physical wants, regaining the mastery over his moral apprehension, he felt a degree of hunger and thirst that reminded him imperiously that he had been fasting for more than fourteen hours; hence he was anxious to find a place where it would be possible for him to rest and refresh himself.

The Jaguar, without further hesitation, marched resolutely in the direction of the light, which he continued to see gleaming among the trees like a beacon. The nearer he drew to the rancho, the firmer became his conviction that he had not deceived himself;

after deep reflection it seemed to him impossible that the Mexicans could have pushed on so far; still, when he was but a short distance from the house, he judged it prudent to double his precautions, not to let himself be surprised, if, contrary to his expectations, he had to deal with an enemy.

On coming within five hundred paces of the rancho he began to grow restless and have less confidence in the opinion he had formed. Several dead horses, two or three corpses lying pell-mell among pieces of weapons and broken carts, led to the evident supposition that a fight had taken place near the rancho. But with whom had the advantage remained? with the Mexicans or the Texans? Who were the persons at this moment in the house—were they friends or foes? these questions were very difficult to solve, and the Jaguar felt extremely embarrassed. Still he was not discouraged. The young man had too long carried on the profession of partisan and scout not to be thoroughly acquainted with all the tricks of the wood-ranger's difficult life. After reflecting a few moments his mind was made up.

Several times, while the rancho had served as headquarters of the Texan army, the Jaguar had gone there either to be present at councils of war or to take the orders of the commander-in-chief. As the approach to the house was thus familiar to him, he resolved to slip up to a window and assure himself, with his own eyes, of what was going on in the rancho.

The light still gleamed, though no sound was heard from the interior, or troubled the deep silence of the night; the Jaguar, without quitting his rifle, which he might require at any moment, lay down on the ground, and, crawling on his hands and knees, advanced toward the house, being careful to keep in the shadow thrown by the thick branches of the trees, in order not to reveal his presence, if, as it was probable, the inhabitants of the house had placed a sentry to watch over their safety. The reasoning of the young man, like all reasoning based on experience, was correct; he had scarce gone fifteen yards ere he saw, standing out from the white wall of the house, the shadow of a man leaning on a rifle, and motionless as a statue. This man was evidently a sentry placed there to watch the approaches to the rancho.

The situation was growing complicated for the Jaguar; the difficulties increased in such proportions, that they threatened soon to become insupportable; for in order to reach the window he wanted, he would be compelled to leave the shadow which had hitherto so fortunately protected him, and enter the white light cast by the moon. He mechanically raised his head, hoping, perhaps, that a cloud would pass over the face of the planet, and intercept its too brilliant light, were it but for a moment; but the sky was of a deep azure, without the smallest cloud, and studded with stars.

The Jaguar felt an enormous inclination to leap on the sentry and throttle him; but supposing it were a friend? it was a knotty point. The young man really did not know what to resolve on, and sought in vain how to get out of the scrape, when the sentry suddenly leveled his rifle in his direction, and aimed at him with the saucy remark:

"Hallo! my friend, when you have crawled far enough like a snake, I suppose you will get up?"

At the sound of this voice, which he believed he recognized, the young man eagerly leaped to his feet.

"Caramba!" he answered with a laugh, you are right, John Davis; I have had enough of that crawling."

"What!" the latter replied, in surprise; "who are you that you know me so well?"

"A friend, *Cuerpo de Cristo!* so raise your rifle."

"A friend, a friend!" the American replied, without changing his position, "that is possible, and the sound of your voice is not unknown to me; but, no matter whether friend or foe, tell me your name, for if you don't, I will keep you on the spot, as this is not the time for fishing."

"Viva Dios!" the young man said with a laugh, "that dear John is always prudent."

"I should hope so, but enough talking; your name that I may know with whom I have to deal."

"What, do you not recognize the Jaguar?"

The American lowered his rifle, and the butt echoed on the ground.

"By Heaven!" he said joyously, "I suspected it was you, but did not dare believe it."

"Why not?" the young man asked as he approached.

"Hang it! because I was assured that you were dead."

"Who the deuce could have told you that nonsense?"

"It is not nonsense. Fray Antonio assured me that he leapt his horse over your body."

The Jaguar reflected for a moment.

"Well," he answered, "he told you the truth."

"What?" the American exclaimed as he gave a start of terror, "are you dead?"

"Oh, oh! make your mind easy," the young man answered with a laugh; "I am as good a living man as yourself."

"Are you quite sure of it?" the superstitious American said dubiously.

"*Rayo de Dios!* I am certain of it, though it is possible that Fray Antonio leaped his horse over my body, for I lay for several hours senseless on the battle-field."

"That is all right, then."

"Thanks; but what are you doing there?"

"As you see, I am on guard."

"Yes, but why are you so? are there more of you inside?"

"There are about a dozen of us."

"All the better; and who are your comrades?"

The American looked at him for some moments fixedly, and then took his hand, which he squeezed.

"My friend," he said with emotion, "thank Heaven, for it has shown you a great mercy this day."

"What do you mean?" the young man exclaimed, anxiously.

"I mean that those you confided to us are safe and sound, in spite of the dangers innumerable they incurred during the terrible day we have passed through."

"Can it be true?" he said, laying his hand on his chest, to check the beating of his heart.

"I assure you."

"Then they are both here?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I must see them!" he exclaimed, as he prepared to rush into the rancho.

"Wait a moment."

"Why so?" he asked in alarm.

"For two reasons: the first being that before you enter, I must warn them of your arrival."

"That is true; go my friend, I will await you here."

"I have not yet told you the second reason."

"What do I care?"

"More than you fancy; do you not wish me to tell you the name of the man who protected and eventually saved Dona Carmela?"

"I do not understand you, my friend. I intrusted the guardianship of Tranquil and Dona Carmela to you."

"You did so."

"Then, was it not you who saved them?"

The American shook his head in denial.

"No," he said, "it was not I, I could only have died with them."

"But who saved them, then? whoever that man may be, I swear—"

"One of your dearest and most devoted friends, Colonel Melendez."

"Oh! I could have sworn it," the young man said impetuously; "why cannot I thank him?"

"You will soon see him."

"How so?"

"At this moment he is busy seeking a safe retreat for the old hunter and his daughter. For the present we shall remain at this rancho, from which he will be able to keep the Mexican soldiers; and so soon as he has found another shelter, he will himself come to tell us."

"Always kind and devoted! I shall never be able to pay my debt to him."

"Who knows?" the American said philosophically; "luck will, perhaps, turn for us, and then it will be our turn to protect our protectors of to-day."

"You are right, my friend; may Heaven grant that it is so; but how did it all happen?"

"The colonel, who seemed, from what he said to me, to have foreboded the danger that Dona Carmela ran, arrived just at the moment, when attacked on all sides at once, and too weak to resist the enemies who overwhelmed us, we were preparing, as we had promised, to die at our post; you can guess the rest. By threats and entreaties, he drove back the soldiers who were attacking us; then, not satisfied with having freed us from our enemies, he desired to secure us against all danger, and accompanied us thus far, recommending us to wait for him here, which I believe we shall be wise in doing."

"Certainly, acting otherwise would be ungrateful. Go, now, my friend, I will wait for you."

John Davis understanding the anxiety from which the young man was suffering, did not let the invitation be repeated, but entered the rancho. The Jaguar remained alone, and was not sorry for it, for he wished to restore some order in his ideas. He felt himself inundated with immense joy at finding again, safe and sound, those whom he had believed dead, and whom he so bitterly lamented; he could scarce dare believe in such happiness, and fancied he must be dreaming, so impossible did all this appear to him. In less than ten minutes John Davis returned.

"Well?" the young man asked.

"Come," he answered laconically.

The American led him forward through a room in which were about a dozen Texans, among them being Fray Antonio, Lanzi, and Quoniam, who were sleeping on trusses of straw laid on the boards. He then pushed open a door and the two men entered a second room not quite as large, and lighted by a smoky candle, standing on a table, which diffused but a dim light. Tranquil was lying on a bed of furs piled on each other, while Dona Carmela was sitting on an equal by his side. On seeing the young man, she rose quickly and ran to meet him.

"Oh!" she cried, as she offered him her hand; "heaven be praised, you have come at last!"

And bending down, she offered him her pale forehead, on which the Jaguar imprinted a respectful kiss, the only answer he could find, as he was suffering from such emotion. Tranquil rose with an effort on his couch, and held out his hand to the young man, who hurried up to him.

"Now, whatever may happen," he said timidly, "I am assured as to the fate of my poor child, since you are near me. We have been terribly alarmed, my friend."

"Alas!" he answered, "I have suffered more than you."

"But what is the matter?" Carmela exclaimed; "you turn pale and totter; are you wounded?"

"No," he answered feebly; "it is the happiness, the emotion, the joy of seeing you again. It is nothing more, so reassure yourself."

And while saying this, he fell back into a butacca half fainting. Carmela, suffering from the most lively alarm, hurriedly attended to him, but John Davis, knowing better than the maiden what the sick man wanted, seized his gourd, and made him drink a long draught of its contents. The emotion the Jaguar was suffering from, combined with the want of food and the fatigue that oppressed him, had caused him this momentary weakness. Tranquil was not deceived; so soon as he saw the young man return to consciousness, he ordered his daughter to get him food, and, as she did not seem to understand, he said with a laugh to the Jaguar:

"I fancy, my friend, that a good meal is the only remedy you need."

The young man tried to smile as he confessed that in truth, he was obliged to confess, in spite of the bad opinion Dona Carmela would form of him, that he was literally dying of hunger. The maiden, reassured by this prosaic confession, immediately began getting him a supper of some sort, for provisions were scanty in the rancho, and it was not an easy matter to procure them. However in a few minutes, Carmela returned with some maize tortillas and a little roast meat, a more than sufficient meal, to which the young man did the greatest honor after apologizing to his charming hostess, who now completely reassured, had resumed her petulant character, and did not fail to tease the young chief, who bravely endured it.

The rest of the night was passed in pleasant conversation by these three persons, who had believed

they would never meet again, and now felt so delighted at being together once more. The sun had risen but an hour when the sentry suddenly challenged, and several horsemen stopped at the gate of the rancho.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A REACTION.

AFTER the sentry's challenge, loud shouts were raised outside the rancho, and ere long, the noise and confusion attained such proportions that the Jaguar, alarmed and not knowing to what to attribute the disturbance, rose with the intention of going to inquire what was taking place. In the present precarious position of the fugitives, the slightest event might prove fatal to them. Carmela went all in a tremor up to Tranquil, who tried in vain to console her, while cocking his pistols and preparing to sell his life dearly.

At the moment when the Jaguar was about to open the door, it was thrown open and John Davis rushed into the room. The American was red, and his eyes sparkled like carbuncles; he seemed affected by a lively emotion, but the expression of his face was rather joyous and surprised than sad.

"What is the matter, then?" the Jaguar asked him.

Without answering his question, the American seized him by the arm, and dragged him away, saying eagerly:

"Come, make haste; you shall see."

"But answer me," the young man continued, trying, though in vain, to escape the powerful grasp that held him. "In Heaven's name, what is the matter?"

"Come, I tell you; come, and you will see."

Understanding that it was useless to continue questioning the American, the Jaguar resolved to follow him, after reassuring his friends and telling them that he should return in a few minutes and inform them what was the event, good or bad, that caused such perturbation in John Davis's mind. When the young man reached the hall, still dragged on by the American, who had not let go his arm, he uttered a shout of joy and dashed forward, after taking a rapid glance around him. Six hundred horsemen, at least, had halted in front of the rancho. They were Texan fugitives from the battle, and among them were nearly all the comrades of the Jaguar, those old Border Rifles who, when the revolution was definitively organized, became freebooters, and with whom the young man had carried out so many hazardous and daring expeditions.

It was the sight of his comrades that had drawn a shout of delight from the Jaguar; while they, on perceiving the chief they adored, rushed toward him with yells of delight. They surrounded him and almost overwhelmed him with their noisy and warm protestations of devotion. The young man drew himself up proudly, and tears of joy ran down his eyelids. All was not over yet, then, the cause of liberty was not lost; since so many generous hearts still beat, the victory of the Mexicans, that victory which they had believed complete, was reduced to the proportions of a deed of arms, brilliant, it is true, but without any political import. Now the Jaguar was no longer a fugitive, a proscribed compelled to conceal himself like a bird of the night; he could march in open day, not having disgraceful conditions to endure at the hands of the victors, who, on the contrary, would speedily learn that the Texan revolution they fancied they had crushed was more lively and vigorous than ever.

All these reflections the Jaguar made in a few seconds; and for him the future, which he had seen an hour previously so somber and menacing, became suddenly smiling and full of dazzling promises. When the first emotion was calmed, and order was returned, the young chief inquired into the events which had caused their arrival at the rancho, and the reason for their coming.

This is what he learned from Fray Antonio; but as, since his return to honesty, the worthy monk had resumed his monastic habits of prolixity, we will take his place and narrate the facts as briefly as possible.

We have said that on entering the rancho the Jaguar, while passing through the first room, had perceived, among the sleepers upon the straw, Lanzi, Quoniam, and Fray Antonio. All these men were really sleeping, but with that light sleep peculiar to hunters and wood-rangers, and the sound of the young man's footsteps had aroused them; so soon as they saw the door of the second room close on the American they rose noiselessly, took up their weapons, and stealthily quitted the rancho. They had done this without exchanging a syllable, and were evidently carrying out a plan arranged beforehand, and which the presence of the sentry had alone impeded. Their horses were saddled in a twinkling, they leapt into their saddles, and when John Davis returned to his post they were far out of reach. The American, who immediately perceived their departure, gave a start of passion, and resumed his rounds, growling between his teeth:

"The deuce take them! I only hope they may get a dose of lead in their heads, provided they do not bring a cuadrilla of Mexican lancers down on us."

Still, the plan of these bold rangers was far from meriting such an imprecation, for they were about to accomplish a work of devotion. Ignorant of Colonel Melendez's promises, and having, moreover, no sort of confidence in the well-known public faith of the Mexicans, they proposed to beat up the country, and assembled all the fugitives of their party they came across, in order to defend Tranquil and Dona Carmela from any insult. In the mean while Lanzi would swim off to the brig, which would be cruising a cable's length from the beach, announce to Captain Johnson the result of the battle of Cerro Pardo, tell him the critical condition in which the old hunter and his daughter were placed, and beg him to go to the rancho and remove the wounded man on board, if circumstances compelled it.

Fortune, which always favors the brave, was far more favorable to the plans of this forlorn hero than they had any right to expect; they had hardly galloped ten miles across the country in no settled direction ere they perceived numerous bivouac fires sparkling through the night in front of a wretched fishing village, situated on the sea-shore a little distance from the Fort on the Point. They stopped to hold a council; but at the moment they prepared to

deliberate, they were suddenly surrounded by a dozen horsemen, and made prisoners, ere they had time to lay hands on their arms or make an effort at defense.

Only one of the three comrades succeeded in escaping, and that was Lanzi; the brave half-breed slipped off his horse, and passing like a serpent between the legs of the horses, he disappeared before his flight was noticed. Lanzi had reflected that by remaining with his comrades he let himself be captured without profit; while if he succeeded in escaping he might hope to accomplish the commission he had undertaken, so that he retained a chance of safety for Tranquil and his daughter. It was in consequence of this reasoning, made with the rapidity that characterized the half-breed, that he attempted and accomplished his bold flight, leaving his comrades to get as best they could out of the awkward scrape they had fallen into.

But a thing happened to the latter which they were far from anticipating, and which the half-breed would never have suspected. The capture of the two men was effected so rapidly; they had been so surprised that not a single word was exchanged on either side; but when they were secured the chief of the detachment ordered them to follow him in a rough voice, and then a curious fact occurred; these men, who could not see each other for the darkness, became old friends again as soon as a sentence had been exchanged. Fray Antonio and his comrades had fallen into the hands of Texan fugitives from the battle, and were the prisoners of their own friends.

After numberless mutual congratulations, explanations came on the carpet, and these horsemen proved to belong to the Jaguar's cuadrilla. When their chief left them to fly to the cart, they continued to fight for some time while awaiting his return; but pressed on all sides, and not seeing him return, they broke and began flying in all directions. As they were perfectly acquainted with the country, it was easy for them to escape the pursuit of the Mexican cavalry; and each, with that instinct peculiar to partisans and guerrillas, proceeded separately to one of the gathering places, whither the Jaguar was accustomed to summon them. Here they nearly all came together again, for the simple reason that, as their cuadrilla formed the rear-guard, it had been the last engaged, and suffered very slightly, as it was almost immediately broken up by the departure of its chief.

During this flight a great number of other partisans had swelled their ranks, so that at this moment their band formed a corps of nearly six hundred resolute men, well mounted and armed, but who, unfortunately, had no leader. The capture of Fray Antonio, who found many of his soldiers among them, was, therefore, a piece of good luck for the partisans, who, though they had been left to their own resources for only a few hours, were already beginning to understand the difficulties of their position, and how dangerous it would become for them if fatality willed it that they should be discovered and attacked by a Mexican corps.

Still, they had acted with great prudence up to this moment. Obligated to leave the retreat they had selected, and which offered them no resources, they had bivouacked a little distance from the Fort of the Point, in order to be protected both by the garrison of the fortress and the fire of their cruisers, which they knew to be close at hand.

When Fray Antonio had picked up this information, which was precious for him, and overwhelmed him with delight, by permitting him to dispose of numerous and determined corps, instead of a few demoralized fugitives of no value, he determined to requite the soldiers who had captured him for the pleasure they caused him telling him that the Jaguar was not dead as they had falsely supposed—that he was not even wounded, but was in hiding at the rancho which had for a long time served as head-quarters of the Texan army; and he would conduct them thither if they pleased. At this proposal of the worthy monk's, the joy of the freebooters became delirious, almost frenzied, for they adored their chief, and longed to place themselves under his orders again. Consequently, the camp was immediately raised, the partisans formed in a column, Fray Antonio placing himself at its head, and the remains of the Texan army set out joyously for the rancho. The reader knows the rest.

The Jaguar warmly thanked Fray Antonio; he then stated that the rancho would temporarily be head-quarters, and ordered his men to bivouac round the house. Still, there was one thing which greatly alarmed the young man: no news had been received of Lanzi. What had become of him? perhaps he had found death in accomplishing his rash enterprise, and trying to reach, by swimming, Captain Johnson's brig. The Jaguar knew the friendship that united Tranquil and the half-breed, and what deep root that friendship had taken in the heart of both, and he feared the effect on the Canadian of the announcement of a calamity which, unhappily, was only too probable. Hence, in spite of his promise of returning at once to the hunter, he walked anxiously up and down in front of the rancho, gazing at intervals out to sea, and not feeling the courage to be present when the Canadian asked after his old friend and was told of his death.

Presently, Carmela appeared in the doorway. The old hunter, not seeing the Jaguar return, and alarmed by the noisy demonstration he heard outside, at length resolved to send the girl on a voyage of discovery, after warning her not to commit any act of imprudence, but return to his side at the slightest appearance of danger. Carmela ran off in delight to find the Jaguar; a few remarks she heard while passing through the house told her what was occurring, and she had no fear about venturing outside. On seeing her the young man checked his hurried walk and waited for her, while trying to give his features an expression agreeing with the lucky situation in which he was supposed to be.

"Well!" she said to him, with that little pouting air which she could assume if necessary, and which suited her so well; "what has become of you, deserter? we have been waiting for you with the most lively impatience, and there you are walking quietly up and down, instead of hurrying to bring us the good news you promised us."

"Forgive me, Carmela," he replied; "I was wrong to appear thus to forget you, and leave you in a state of anxiety; but so many extraordinary things

have occurred, that I do not really yet know whether I am awake or dreaming."

"Everybody deserts us this morning, not excepting Lanzi and Quoniam, who have not yet made their appearance."

"You will pardon them, senorita, for I am the sole cause of their absence. I found myself compelled to trust them both with important duties, but I trust they will soon return, and directly they do so, I will send them to you."

"But are you not coming in, Jaguar? my father would be glad to talk with you."

"I should like to do so, Carmela, but at this moment it is impossible; remember that the army is utterly disorganized, at each moment fresh men who have escaped from the battle join us; only a few chiefs have turned up as yet, the rest are missing. I alone must undertake to restore a little order in this chaos; but be assured that so soon as I have a second to myself, I will take advantage to join you. Alas! it is only by your side that I am happy."

The maiden blushed slightly at this insinuation, and answered at once with a degree of coldness in her accents, of which she immediately repented, in seeing the impression her words caused the young man, and the cloud they brought to his forehead.

"You are at liberty to remain here as long as you please, caballero; in speaking to you as I did I merely carried a message my father gave me for you; the rest concerns me but little."

The young man bowed without replying, and turned away his head not to let the cruel girl see the sorrow she caused him by this harsh and unmerited apostrophe. Carmela walked a few steps toward the house, but on reaching the threshold she ran back and offered her little hand to the young chief with an exquisite smile.

"Forgive me, my friend," she said to him, "I am a madcap. You are not angry with me, I trust?"

"I am angry with you," he replied, sadly, "why should I be so, by what right? What else am I to you than a stranger, an indifferent being, a stranger too happy to be endured without any display of impatience on your part."

The maiden bit her lips angrily.

"Will you not take the hand I offer you?" she said with a slight tinge of impatience.

The Jaguar looked at her for a moment fixedly, and then seized her hand, on which he imprinted a burning kiss.

"Why should the head ever do injustice to the heart?" he said, with a sigh.

"Am I not a woman?" she replied with a smile that filled his heart with joy; "we are waiting for you, so come soon," she added, and shaking her finger at him, she ran back into the house like a startled fawn, and laughing like a madcap.

The Jaguar gazed after her until she at length disappeared in the interior of the rancho.

"She is but a coquettish child," he murmured in a low voice; "has she a heart?"

A stifled sigh was the sole answer he found for the difficult question he asked himself, and he bent his eyes again on the sea. Suddenly he uttered a cry of joy; he had just seen, above the rocks which terminated on the right, the small bay on which the cuadrilla was encamped, the tall masts of the *Libertad* corvette, followed or rather convoyed by the brig. The two ships, impelled by a favorable breeze, soon doubled the point, and entered the bay; while the corvette made short tacks not to run ashore on the dangerous coast, the brig shortened sail and remained stationary. A boat was immediately let down, several persons seated themselves in it, and the sailors, letting their oars fall simultaneously into the water, pulled vigorously for the shore.

The distance they had to row was nearly half a mile, and hence the Jaguar was unable to recognize the persons who were arriving. Anxious to know, however, what he had to depend on, he mounted the first horse he came across, and galloped toward the boat, followed by some twenty freebooters. The young man reached the coast at the precise moment when the bows of the boat ran into the sand. There were three sailors in the boat: Captain Johnson and the person we have met before under the name of El Alferez, and lastly, Lanzi. On perceiving the latter, the young chief could not restrain a shout of joy, and without thinking of even saluting the other two, he seized the half-breed's hand and pressed it cordially several times.

The captain and his companion, far from being annoyed at this apparent want of politeness, seemed, on the contrary, to witness with pleasure; this frank and spontaneous manifestation of an honorable feeling.

"Bravo, caballero!" said the captain; "by heaven! you do right to press that man's hand, for he is a loyal and devoted fellow: ten times during the past night he risked his life in trying to reach my ship, which he at length came aboard, half drowned and dead with fatigue."

"Nonsense," the half-breed said negligently; "it was nothing at all; the main point was to reach you, as my poor comrades had the ill-luck to be taken prisoners."

The Jaguar began laughing.

"Don't be alarmed, my brave fellow," he said to him; "your comrades are as free as yourself, and you will soon see them; there was a mistake in all this which they will have the pleasure of explaining to you."

Lanzi opened his eyes in amazement at this partial revelation, which he did not at all understand, but he made no answer, contenting himself with shrugging his shoulders several times. The Jaguar then offered the captain and his two companions horses on which they could proceed to the rancho, and which they accepted. The partisans who had followed their chief, on hearing this offer, hastened to dismount, and courteously presented their horses to the strangers. The latter, without stopping to make a choice, mounted the horses nearest to them, and started.

While galloping along, the three new-comers looked about them with surprise, not at all comprehending what they saw; for a time, the Jaguar paid no great attention to their maneuvers, and continued to talk about indifferent topics; but their preoccupation soon became so marked that he perceived it, and could not refrain from asking the cause of it.

"On my word, caballeros," the captain said, all at once taking the ball at the rebound; "if you had not asked me that question, I was on the point of

asking you one, for I frankly confess that I understand nothing of what is happening to us."

"What is happening, pray?"

"Why, I learned last night from this worthy lad, the frightful defeat you experienced yesterday; the total loss and the utter dispersion of your army; I hurried up to offer you and yours, whom I supposed tracked like wild beasts and without shelter of any sort, an asylum aboard my vessel, and I have barely set foot on land, ere I find myself in the midst of this army which I supposed to be swept away like autumn leaves by a storm; and this army is as firm and well disciplined as before the battle. Explain to me, I beg, the meaning of this riddle, for I have really given it up, as impossible to guess."

"I am ready to satisfy your curiosity," the Jaguar answered with a smile; "but first of all I crave some valuable news from you."

"Very good; but answer me this first. Has the battle really taken place?"

"Certainly."

"And you have been whipped?"

"To our hearts' content."

"That is strange, I understand less than ever; well, speak, I am listening to you."

"Is the Fort of the Point still in the hands of our friends?"

"Yes; our ships have left it an hour at the most. Ever since you so daringly surprised it, the Mexicans have not come within gun-shot."

"May Heaven be praised!" the young man exclaimed impetuously; "nothing is lost in that case, and all can be repaired. Yes, captain, we have been beaten, we have suffered a frightful defeat; but, as you know, during the ten years we have been struggling against the Mexican power, our oppressors have often believed us crushed, and it is the same this time, thanks be to Heaven! Two of our best cuadrillas have escaped almost in safety the horrible massacre of the other corps, and they are those you see assembled here. At each moment straggling fugitives join us, so that within a week we shall probably be able to resume the offensive. God is on our side, for the cause we defend is sacred; we are the soldiers of an idea, and must conquer. The defeat of yesterday will be of use to us in the future."

"You are right, my friend," the captain answered warmly. "This revolution in truth resembles no other; ever conquered, and ever up in arms, you are stronger to-day, after your numerous defeats, than when you began the struggle. The finger of Heaven is there, and a man must be mad not to perceive it. Hence your losses are limited to men and arms?"

"To men and arms solely; we have not lost an inch of ground. I seek in vain the reason that prevented the victorious Mexicans pursuing us, for we have kept all our positions, and are scarce ten miles from the battle-field."

"Many of our chiefs, I presume, have fallen, or are in the hands of the enemy?"

"I fear so; still, several have already come in, and others will probably still join us. There is one, unfortunately, about whom we have no news—you know to whom I refer; if the day pass without his making his appearance, I shall start in search of him."

The Jaguar had spoken the truth; each moment soldiers who had escaped from the battle-field arrived. During the short hour that had elapsed since he left the rancho, more than two hundred had joined the camp.

"You see," said the young chief, looking around him proudly, "that, in spite of our defeat, nothing has really changed for us, as we have retained our head-quarters, and the banner of Texan independence still floats from its azotea."

The horsemen then dismounted, and entered the rancho.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PAGE OF HISTORY.

THE Jaguar was mistaken, or rather flattered himself, when he said that the defeat of Cerro Pardo had caused but an insignificant loss to the revolutionary party; for Galveston, too weak to attempt resistance to the attack of the Mexican army, had not attempted to complete his victory by definitively crushing his enemies, and pursuing them to the death. General Rubio really intended not to give those he had beaten breathing time, but his will was suddenly paralyzed by another more powerful than his own.

The facts that then occurred are so strange that they deserve to be described in their fullest details.

We return to General Rubio, at the moment when the Texans, broken by Colonel Melendez's charge, and understanding that victory was hopelessly slipping from their grasp, began flying in every direction, without trying to defend themselves longer, or keep the ground they held. The general had stationed himself on an eminence whence he surveyed the whole battle-field, and followed the movements of the various corps engaged. So soon as he saw the disorder produced in the enemy's ranks, he understood the advantage he could derive from this precipitate flight by closely pursuing the fugitives up to the Fort of the Point, where he could certainly enter pell-mell without striking a blow. But haste was needed not to give the enemy time to reform a little further on, which the chiefs who commanded them would not fail to attempt, if but an hour's respite were granted them.

The general turned to an aide-de-camp by his side and was just going to send Colonel Melendez orders to start all his cavalry in pursuit of the Texans, when a platoon of a dozen lancers suddenly appeared, commanded by an officer who galloped full speed to the spot where the general was, making signs and waving his hat. The general looked in surprise at this officer, who he knew did not belong to his army. A minute later he gave a start of surprise and disappointment, took a sorrowful glance at the battle-field, and stood biting his mustache and muttering in a low voice.

"Command this sal on officer and colon-clanker! Why did he not remain in Mexico? What does the president mean by sending us this gall-plumed sprig, to make us lose all the profits of the victory?"

At this moment the officer came up to the general, bowed respectfully, drew a large sealed envelope from his breast, and handed it to him. The general coldly returned the salutation, took the

letter, opened it, and looked at it with a frown; but almost immediately he crumpled the letter up passionately, and addressed the officer, who was standing motionless and stiff before him:

"You are the aide-de-camp of the President General of the Republic?" he said, roughly.

"Yes, general," the officer answered, with a bow.

"Hum! Where is the president at this moment?"

"Four leagues off at the most, with two thousand troops."

"Where has he halted?"

"His excellency has not halted, general, but, on the contrary, is advancing with forced marches to join you."

The general gave a start of anger.

"It is well," he continued, presently. "Return at full gallop to his excellency, and announce to him my speedy arrival."

"Pardon me, general, but it seems to me that you have not read the dispatch I had the honor of handing you," the officer said, respectfully, but firmly.

The general looked at him askance.

"I have not time at this moment to read the dispatch," he said, dryly.

"I shall have the honor then, general, to inform you of the contents, for the order it contains is peremptory."

"Ah," said the general with a frown. "What may your name be, señor?"

"Don Jose Rivas, general."

"It is well, señor. Don Jose Rivas, I shall remember your name."

The menacing tone in which the words were uttered did not escape the officer and he blushed slightly.

"I am very unfortunate, general, poor subaltern as I am, to find myself thus placed, against my will, under the alternative of failing in my duty or incurring your displeasure."

The general remained silent for a moment; then his face became calm again, and he said to an officer, with a smile:

"I was wrong. Forgive me, caballero; but I was not master of a burst of anger. A man cannot be thus deprived, by a caprice, of the fruit of a thousand fatigues, and not feel a certain amount of displeasure. Go and announce to his excellency that, not knowing his wishes, I fought the battle, but that, in obedience to his orders, I stopped it at the first word you said to me. You can go."

The general bowed to his horse's neck, and burying his spurs in the flanks of his noble animal, started at a gallop, followed by his escort. The general, a moment previously so proud and glad, let his head fall on his chest in despair.

"Oh!" he muttered, as he gave a desperate glance at his army, "such a splendid battle and so well managed!" and he stifled a sigh.

In the meanwhile the officers collected round the general, and loudly asked him for authority to pursue the conquest. The general raised his head.

"Order the retreat to be sounded!" he said.

The aides-de-camp looked at him with amazement, and fancied they must have misunderstood him.

"Yes," the general went on, "sound the retreat. The army," he added, with a bitter smile, "will return to its first position, as is ordered by his Excellency Santa Anna, President of the Republic. I am no longer your chief; my command has been taken from me by the president, who undertakes the direction of the army."

The officers and aides-de-camp who surrounded the general, sharing in their chief's sorrow, lowered their heads, blushing with shame and anger, and at a final order from the general, prepared to execute his wishes, though much against the grain. The soldiers, excited by the smell of gunpowder and the intoxication inseparable from fighting, could only be restrained with difficulty, the more so, because their chiefs, far from responding to the repeated appeals of the bugle, on the contrary, exerted their horsemen to pursue the Texans; still, by degrees, the voice of the aides-de-camp sent by the general was listened to, and discipline resumed its sway. Order was re-established, and the Mexican army fell back on the positions they had left in the morning to commence the action, and lit their camp-fires.

At about eight in the evening Santa Anna effected his junction with General Rubio. The president of the republic, after cordially saluting the general, took over the command, and then withdrew to the house prepared for him, which he made his headquarters.

At the period when our history takes place, General Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna was thirty-nine to forty years of age; he was tall and finely built; he had a lofty and projecting forehead, rounded chin, and slightly aquiline nose, large black eyes, full of expression, and a flexible mouth, which gave him an air of remarkable nobility, while his black and curly hair, which formed a contrast to the yellowish tinge of his complexion, covered his temples and his high-boned cheeks. Such, physically, was the man who, for thirty years, has been the evil genius of Mexico, and has led it to infallible ruin by making himself the cause or pretext of all the wars and revolutions which, since his first assumption of power, have incessantly overwhelmed this unhappy country.

We must now ask our reader's pardon, but we must talk a little politics, and describe cursorily the facts which preceded and led to the denouement of the story we have undertaken to narrate.

If the Mexicans had gained an important advantage over the Texans, in another portion of the revolted territory they had experienced a check, whose consequences must prove immense for them. The Mexican General Cos was besieged in the town of Bejar by the Texans: the latter, with that want of foresight so natural to volunteers of all countries, believing that they had only a campaign of a few days, had laid in no provisions or winter clothing, though the rainy season was at hand, hence they were beginning to grow discouraged and talk about raising the siege; when El Alferéz, that mysterious personage we have come across several times, went to the general in chief, and pledged himself to compel the Mexicans to capitulate, if three hundred men were given him.

The young partisan's reputation for intrepidity had long been famed among the Texans, and hence his offer was accepted with enthusiasm. El Alferéz performed his promise. The town was captured after four terrible assaults; but the young chief,

struck by a bullet in the forehead, fell in the breach, with his triumph as his winding-sheet. A fact was then ascertained which had hitherto been only vaguely suspected:—El Alferéz, the daring and formidable partisan, was a woman. General Cos, his staff, and one thousand five hundred Mexicans laid down their arms, and all fled, in the presence of the handful of insurgents who had survived the assaults and the corpse of their intrepid chieftain, which was clothed in feminine attire, and seated in a chair covered with the flags taken from the vanquished. The Mexicans left the territory of the New Republic, after pledging their word of honor not to oppose the recognition of independence.

Santa Anna received news of the defeat at Bejar while stationed at San Luis de Potosi. Furious at the affront the Mexican arms had received, the President, after flying into a furious passion with the generals who had hitherto directed the military operations, swore to avenge the honor of Mexico, which was so disgracefully compromised, and finally finish with these rebels whom no one had yet been able to conquer. The President organized an army of six thousand men, a truly formidable army, if we take into account the resources of the country in which these events occurred. The preparations, urged on by that vigor produced by wounded pride and the hope of vengeance, were soon completed, and Santa Anna entered Texas, after dividing his army into three corps, under the orders of Filisola, Cos, Urrea and Garrey. After effecting his junction with General Rubio, to whom he had sent an aide-de-camp with orders to remain in his quarters and not risk a battle before his arrival, an order which the general received too late, the President determined to deal a decisive blow by recapturing Bejar and seizing on Goliad.

Bejar and Goliad are two Spanish towns; roads run from them to a common center, the heart of the Anglo-American settlements. The capture of these two towns, as the basis of operations, was, consequently, of the highest importance to the Mexicans. The Texans, weakened and demoralized by their last defeat, were unable to resist so formidable an invasion as the one with which they saw themselves menaced. The Mexican army carried on a true war of savages, passing like a flood over this hapless country, burning and plundering the towns. The two first months that followed Santa Anna's arrival in Texas were an uninterrupted series of successes for the Mexicans, and seemed to justify the new method inaugurated by the President, however barbarous and inhuman it might be in its results. The Texans found themselves in a moment reduced to so precarious a condition, that their ruin appeared to competent men inevitable, and merely a question of time.

Let us describe, in a few words, the operations of the Mexican army. Before resuming our narrative at the point where we left it, we have said already that the Mexican forces had been divided into three corps. Three thousand men, that is to say, one moiety of the Mexican army, commanded by Generals Santa Anna and Cos, and well supplied with artillery, proceeded to lay siege to Bejar. This town had only a feeble garrison of one hundred and eighty men, but this garrison was commanded by Colonel Travis, one of the greatest and purest heroes of the War of Independence. When fully invested, Travis withdrew to the citadel, not feeling at all alarmed by the numbers he had to fight. He was summoned to surrender.

"Nonsense!" he answered with a smile; "we will all die, but your victory will cost you so dearly that a defeat would be better for you."

And he loyally kept his word, resisting for a whole fortnight with unexampled bravery, and incessantly exhorting his comrades. Thirty-two Texans managed to throw themselves into the fort, after traversing the entire Mexican army.

"We have come to die with you," the chief of this heroic forlorn hope said to him.

"Thanks," was all the answer.

Santa Anna, whose strength had been more than doubled during the siege, summoned Colonel Travis for the last time, saying there would be madness in risking an assault with a practicable breach.

"We will fill it up with our dead bodies," the colonel nobly answered.

The President ordered the assault, and the Texans were killed to the last man. The Mexicans then entered the citadel, not as conquerors, but with a secret apprehension, and as if ashamed of their triumph. They had lost fifteen hundred men.

"Oh!" Santa Anna exclaimed bitterly, "another such victory and we are lost!"

So soon as Bejar was reduced, attention was turned to Goliad. But here one of those facts occurred which history is compelled to register, were it only to stigmatize and eternally brand the men who have been guilty. Goliad is an open town, without walls or citadel; to arrest an enemy, and Colonel Fannin had abandoned it, as he had only five hundred Texan volunteers with him. Compelled to leave his ammunition and baggage behind, in order to effect his retreat with greater speed, he was suddenly attacked on the prairie by General Urrea's Mexican division, nineteen hundred strong. Obeying their colonel's orders, the Texans formed square, and for a whole day endured the attack of the foe without flinching. The Mexicans involuntarily admiring the desperate heroism of these men, who had no hope of salvation, implored them to surrender, while offering them good and honorable conditions. The Texans hesitated for a long time, for, as they did not dare trust the word of their enemies, they preferred to die. Still, when one hundred and forty Texans had fallen, the colonel resolved to lay down his arms, on the condition that his soldiers and himself should be regarded as prisoners of war, treated as such, and that the American volunteers should be embarked for the United States at the charges of the Mexican Government. These conditions having been accepted by General Urrea, the Texans surrendered.

Santa Anna, who was still at Bejar, refused to ratify the treaty; and by his express orders, in spite of the prayers and supplications of all his generals, he directed the massacre of the prisoners. The three hundred and fifty prisoners were murdered in cold blood,

* It was at this marvelous siege, better known as that of the Alamo, that Colonel Crockett and Bowie were killed.

on a prairie situated between Goliad and the sea. General Urrea, whom this infamous treason dishonored, broke his sword, weeping with rage. This horrible massacre was the signal for a general upheaval, and all ran to arms; despair restored the energy of the insurgents, and a new army seemed to spring from the ground as if by enchantment. General Houston was appointed commander-in-chief, and on both sides preparations were made for the supreme and decisive struggle.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BIVOUAC.

As we have already said, Texas had reached a decisive epoch. Unfortunately, her future seemed as gloomy as that of the conquered. In spite of the heroic efforts attempted by the insurgents, the rapid progress of the invasion was watched with terror, and no possible means of resistance could be seen. Still it was this moment when all appeared desperate, which the Convention, calm and moved by a love of liberty more ardent than ever, selected to hurl a last and supreme defiance at the invaders. Not allowing itself to be intimidated by evil fortune, the Convention replied to the menaces of the conquerors by a statement of rights, and the definitive declaration of the independence of a country which was almost entirely occupied by, and in the power of the Mexicans. It improvised a constitution, created a provisional executive authority, decreed all the measures of urgency which the gravity of circumstances demanded, and finally nominated General Sam Houston Commander-in-Chief, with the most widely extended powers.

Unhappily the Texan army no longer existed, for its previous defeats had completely annihilated it. But if military organization might be lacking, the enthusiasm was more ardent than ever. The Texans had sworn to bury themselves under the smoking ruins of their plundered towns and villages sooner than return under the detested yoke of their oppressors. And this oath they were not only prepared to keep, but had already kept at Bejar and Goliad; however low a people may appear, and is really in the sight of its tyrants, when all its acting strength is concentrated in the firm and immutable will, to live free or die, it is certain to recover from its defeats, and to rise again one day a conqueror, and regenerated by the blood of the martyrs who have succumbed in the supreme struggle of liberty against slavery.

General Houston had scarce been appointed ere he prepared to act, and he reached the banks of the Guadalupe three days after the capture of the Alamo. The Texan troops amounted to three hundred men, badly armed, badly clothed, almost dying of hunger, but burning to take their revenge. General Houston was a stern and severe patriot; his name is revered in Texas like that of Washington in the United States, or of Lafayette in France. Houston was a precursor, or one of those geniuses whom it pleases God to create when He desires to render a people free. At the sight of this army of three hundred men, Houston was not discouraged; on the contrary, he felt his enthusiasm redoubled, the heroic relics of the ten thousand victims who had succumbed since the beginning of the war had not despaired of the salvation of their country; like their predecessors, they were ready to die for her. It was a sacred phalanx with which he would achieve miracles.

Still, it was not with these three hundred men, however brave and resolute they might be, that general Houston could entertain a hope of defeating the Mexicans, who, rendered presumptuous by their past successes, eagerly sought the opportunity to finish once for all with the insurgents, by crushing the last relics of their army. General Houston, before risking an action on which the fate of his new country would doubtless depend, resolved to form an army once more; for this purpose, instead of marching on the enemy, he fell back on the Colorado, and thence on the Brazos, burning and destroying everything in his passage, in order to starve the Mexicans out.

These clever tactics obtained all the success the general expected from them; for a very simple reason; as he fell back on the Mexican frontier, his army was daily augmented by fresh recruits, who, on the report of his approach, left their houses or farms to enlist under his banner; while the contrary happened to the Mexicans, who at each march they made in pursuit of the insurgents, left a few laggards behind, who by so much diminished their strength.

The Texan general had a powerful motive for falling back on the American frontier; he hoped to obtain some help from General Gaines, who, by the order of President Jackson had advanced on Texan territory as far as the town of Nacogdoches. Such was the state of affairs between Houston and Santa Anna, the one retreating, the other continually advancing; though ere long they must meet face to face, in a battle which would decide the great question of a nation's emancipation or servitude.

On the day when we resume our narrative it was about eight in the evening, the heat had been stifling throughout the day, and although night had fallen long before, this heat, far from diminishing, had but increased: there was not a breath of air, the atmosphere was oppressive, and low lightning-laden clouds rolled heavily athwart the sky; all, in fact, foreboded a storm.

On the banks of a rather wide stream, whose yellowish and turbid waters flowed mournfully between banks clothed with cottonwood trees, the bivouac fires of a small detachment of cavalry might be seen glistening like stars in the darkness. This stream was a affluent of the Colorado, and the men encamped on its banks were Texans. They were but twenty-five in number, and composed the entire cavalry of the Army of Independence; they were commanded by the Jaguar.

While the horsemen were sadly crouching over the fires, not far from which their horses were huddled, and conversing in a low voice, their chief, who had retired to a jacal made of branches and lighted by a smoky candle, was sitting on an equinal with his back leaning against a tree trunk, with his arms folded on his chest and gazing at vacancy. The Jaguar was no longer the young and ardent man we introduced to our readers; his face was pale, his features contracted, and eyes bloodshot with fever,

and, though faith still dwelt in his heart, hope was dead.

The truth was that death had begun to make frightful gaps around him; his dearest friends, the most devoted supporters of the cause he defended, had fallen one after the other in this implacable struggle. El Alferez, Captain Johnson, Ramirez, Fray Antonio, were lying in their bloody graves; of others he received no news, nor knew what had become of them; he therefore stood alone, like an oak bowed by the wind and beaten by the storm, resisting intrepidly, but foreseeing his approaching fall.

General Houston, in his calculated retreat, had confided the command of the rear guard, that is to say, the most honorable and dangerous post, to the Jaguar; a post he had accepted with gloomy joy, as he felt sure that he would fall gloriously, while watching over the safety of all.

In the mean time the night became blacker and blacker, the horizon more menacing; a white and sharp rain began piercing the gray fog; the storm was rapidly approaching, and must soon burst forth. The soldiers watched with terror the progress of the storm, and instinctively sought shelter against this convulsion of nature, which was far more terrible than the other dangers which menaced them. For no one, who has not witnessed it, can form even a remote idea of an American hurricane, which twists trees like wisps of straw, fires forests, levels mountains, drives streams from their bed, and in a few hours convulses the surface of the soil.

Suddenly a dazzling flash furrowed the darkness, and a crashing burst of thunder broke the majestic silence that brooded over the landscape. At the same instant the sentry stationed a few paces in front of the bivouac challenged. The Jaguar sprang up as if he had received an electric shock, and bounding forward, as he mechanically seized the weapons lying within reach, listened. The dull sound of horses' hoofs could be heard on the sodden ground.

"Who's there?" the sentry challenged a second time.

"Friends," a voice replied.

"*Quo gentes?*"

"Texas."

The Jaguar emerged from the jacal.

"To arms!" he shouted to his men, "we must not let ourselves be surprised."

"Come, come," the voice continued, "I see that I have not diverged from the track, since I can hear the Jaguar."

"Hallo!" the latter said in surprise, "who are you, that you know me so well?"

"By Jove! a friend whose voice should be familiar to you, at any rate."

"John Davis!" the young man exclaimed with a joy he did not attempt to conceal.

"All right!" the American continued gayly. "I thought that we should understand one another presently."

"Come, come; let him pass, men, he is a friend."

Five or six horsemen entered the camp and dismounted.

At this moment the storm burst forth furiously, passing like a whirlwind over the plain, the twisted trees on which were in a second uprooted and borne away by the hurricane. The Texans had made their horses lie down, and were themselves lying down by their side on the wet soil, in the hope of offering a smaller surface to the gusts that passed with a mournful howl above their heads. It was a spectacle full of wild grandeur, presented by this ravaged plain, incessantly crossed by flashes which illuminated the landscape with fantastic hues, while the thunder rolled hoarsely in the depths of the heavens, and the clouds scudded along like a routed army, dashing against each other with electric collisions.

For nearly three hours the hurricane raged, leveling everything in its passage; at length, at about one in the morning, the rain became less dense, the wind gradually calmed, the thunder rolled at longer intervals, and the sky, swept clean by a final effort of the tempest, appeared again blue and star-spangled; the hurricane had gone away to vent its fury in other regions. The men and horses rose; all breathed again, and tried to restore a little order in camp. This was no easy task, for the jacal had been carried away, the fires extinguished, and the logs dispersed in all directions; but the Texans were tried men, long accustomed to the dangers and fatigues of desert life. The tempest, instead of crushing them, had, on the contrary, restored their strength and patience, though not their courage, for that had never failed them.

They set gayly to work, and in two hours all the injury caused by the tempest was repaired as well as the precarious resources they had at their disposal permitted; the fires were lighted again, and the jacal reconstructed. Any stranger who had entered the camp at this moment would not have supposed that so short a time previously they had been assailed by so fearful a hurricane. The Jaguar was anxious to talk with John Davis, whom he had only seen since his arrival, and had found it impossible to exchange a syllable. When order was restored, therefore, he went up to him and begged him to enter the jacal.

"Permit me," the American said, "to bring with me three of my comrades whom I am convinced you will be delighted to meet."

"Do so," the Jaguar answered; "who are they?"

"I will not deprive you," Davis said, with a smile, "of the pleasure of recognizing them yourself."

The young chief did not press the matter, for he knew the ex-slave-dealer too well not to place the most perfect confidence in him. A few minutes later, according to his promise, Davis entered the jacal with his comrades; the Jaguar gave a start of joy at seeing them, and quickly walked up to offer his hand. These three men were Lanzi, Quoniam, and Black-deer.

"Oh, oh!" he exclaimed, "here you are, then. Heaven be praised! I did not dare hope for your return."

"Why not?" Lanzi asked; "as we are still alive, thanks to God! you ought to have expected us."

"So many things have happened since our parting, so many misfortunes have assailed us, so many of our friends have fallen not to rise again, that, on receiving no news of you, I trembled at the thought that you might also be dead."

"You know, my friend," the American said,

"that we have been absent a very long time, and are consequently quite ignorant of what has happened since our departure."

"Well, I will tell you all. But first one word."

"Speak."

"Where is Tranquil?"

"Only a few leagues from here, and you will soon see him; he sent me forward, indeed, to warn you of his speedy arrival."

"Thanks," the young man replied, pensively.

"Is that all you desire to know?"

"Nearly so, for of course you have received no news of—"

"News of whom?" the American asked, seeing that the Jaguar hesitated.

"Of Carmela!" he at length said, with a tremendous effort.

"Of Carmela?" John Davis exclaimed, in surprise: "how could we have received any news? Tranquil, on the contrary, hopes to hear some from you."

"From me?"

"Hang it! you must know better than any of us how the dear child is."

"I do not understand you."

"And yet it is very clear. I will not remind you in what way we succeeded, after the capture of the Larchtree, in saving the poor girl from that villain who carried her off; I will merely remind you that on the very day when Tranquil and I, by your express orders, started to join Loyal Heart, the maiden was confided in your presence to Captain Johnson, who would convey her to the house of a respectable lady at Galveston, who was willing to offer her a shelter."

"Well?"

"What do you mean by well?"

"Yes, I know all that, so it was useless to tell it to me. What I ask you is, whether, since Carmela went to Galveston, you have received any news of her?"

"Why, it is impossible, my friend; how could we have received any? Remember that we proceeded to the desert."

"That is true," the young man replied, disconsolately: "I am mad. Forgive me."

"What is the matter? why this pallor, my friend, this restlessness I see in your eyes?"

"Ah!" he said, with a sigh, "it is because I have received news of Carmela, if you have not."

"You, my friend?"

"Yes, I."

"A long time ago, I presume?"

"No—yesterday evening," he said, with a bitter smile.

"I do not at all understand you."

"Well, listen to me. What I am going to tell you is not long, but it is important, I promise you."

"I am listening."

"We form, as you are doubtless aware, the extreme rear guard of the army of liberation."

"Yes, I know that, and it helped me in finding your trail."

"Very good; hence hardly a day passes in which we do not exchange musket-shots and saber-cuts with the Mexicans."

"Go on."

"Yesterday—you see it is not stale—we were suddenly charged by forty Mexican horse; it was about three in the afternoon, when General Houston was crossing the river with the main body. We had orders to offer a desperate resistance, in order to protect the retreat. This order was needless; at the sight of the Mexicans we rushed madly upon them, and the action at once commenced. After a few minutes' fighting the Mexicans gave way, and finally fled, leaving three or four dead on the battle-field. Too weak to pursue the enemy, I had given my soldiers orders to return, and was myself preparing to do the same, when two flying Mexicans, instead of continuing their flight, stopped, and fastening their handkerchiefs to their saber-blades, made me a signal that they desired to parley. I approached the two men, who bore a greater likeness to bandits than to soldiers; and one of them, a man of tall stature and furious looks, said to me at once, when I asked them what they wanted—

"To do you a service, if you are, as I suppose, the Jaguar."

"Yes, I am he," I answered, "but what is your name? who are you?"

"It is of little consequence who I am, provided that my intentions are good."

"Still, I must know them."

"Hunt!" he said, "you are very distrustful, comrade."

"Come, Sandoval," the other horseman said, in a voice gentle as a woman's, as he suddenly joined in the conversation, "do not beat about thus, but finish your business."

"I ask nothing better than to finish," he replied, coarsely; "it is this gentleman who compels me to swerve, when I wished to go straight ahead."

"The second rider shrugged his shoulders with a disdainful smile, and turned to me."

"In a word, caballero, here is a paper which a person, in whom you take great interest, requested us to deliver to you."

"I eagerly seized the paper, and prepared to open it, for a secret foreboding warned me of misfortune."

"No," the Mexican continued eagerly arresting my hand, "wait till you have joined your men again, to read that letter."

"I consent," I said, "but I presume you do not intend to do me a gratuitous service, whatever its nature may be?"

"Why so?"

"Because you do not know me, and the interest you take in me must be very slight."

"Perhaps so," the writer answered; "still, pledge yourself to nothing, I warn you, till you know the contents of that letter."

"Then he made a signal to his comrade, and after bowing slightly, they started at a gallop, and left me considerably embarrassed at the way in which this singular interview had ended, and twisting in my fingers the letter I did not dare open."

"Well," the American muttered, "what did you, so soon as the men left you alone?"

"I looked after them a long time, and then, suddenly recalled to my duty by several carbine shots whose bullets whizzed past my ears, I bent down over my horse's neck and regained the bivouac at full gallop. On arriving, I opened the letter, for I was burning with impatience and curiosity."

"And it was?"

"From Carmela."

"By Heavens!" the American said, as he clapped his thigh; "I would have wagered it."

CHAPTER XXI.

SANDOVAL.

"Yes," the Jaguar continued presently in a broken voice; "this letter was entirely in Carmela's handwriting. Would you like to know the contents?"

The American looked around him.

"Well, what matter?" the Jaguar exclaimed with some violence; "are not these brave lads our friends, faithful and devoted friends? why keep secret from them a thing I should be forced to tell them, perhaps to-morrow?"

John Davis bowed.

"You did not understand my thought," he said. "I am not afraid about them, but of those who may be possibly listening outside."

The young man shook his head.

"No, no," he said, "fear nothing, John Davis, my old friend; no one is listening to us."

"Read the letter in that case, for I am anxious to know its contents."

Although the dawn was beginning to tinge the horizon with all the prismatic colors, the light was not yet sufficient to read by. Lanzi, therefore, seized the candle, whose smoky wick smoldered without spreading any great light, snuffed it with his fingers, and held it in a line with the Jaguar's face. The latter, after a moment's hesitation, drew from the pocket of his velvet jacket a dirty and crumpled piece of paper, unfolded it, and read:

"To the chief of the Texan Freebooters, surnamed the Jaguar:

"If you really take the interest in me you have so often offered to prove to me, save me, save the daughter of your friend! Having left Galveston to go in search of my father, I have fallen into the hands of my most cruel enemy. I have only hope in two men in this world, yourself and Colonel Melendez. My father is too far for me to be allowed to hope effectual assistance from him. And besides, his life is too precious to me for me to consent to him risking it. Whatever may happen, I trust in you as in God; will you fail me?"

"The disconsolate CARMELA."

"Hum!" the American muttered; "is that all?"

"No," the young man answered, "there is a second note written below the first."

"Ah, ah! by Carmela?"

"No."

"By whom, then?"

"I do not know, for it is not signed."

"And do you suspect anybody?"

"Perhaps I do—but before telling you whom I suspect, I had better read you the second letter."

"For what reason?"

"In order to know whether you share in my suspicions, and if they corroborate mine."

"Good, I understand you. Read!"

The Jaguar took up the paper again and read: "This letter, written in duplicate, is addressed by Dona Carmela to two persons, Senor El Jaguar and Colonel Melendez; but the second copy has not yet been delivered, as I am awaiting the Jaguar's answer ere doing so. It depends on him not only to save a young lady, interesting in every respect, but also, if he will, to secure the triumph of the cause for which he is combating so valiantly. For this purpose, he has only an easy thing to do; he will proceed between eight and nine o'clock in the morning to the Cueva del Venado; a man will issue from the grotto, and tell him on what conditions he consents to aid him in this double enterprise."

The Jaguar folded up the paper, and placed it in his jacket pocket.

"Is that all?" the American asked a second time.

"This time, yes, it is all," the young man answered; "now what do you think of this epistle?"

"Why, I think that the man who wrote it is the same who handed you the letter."

"We are agreed, for I think so too. And what, in your opinion, ought I to do?"

"Ah, that is a more difficult question than the first; the case is serious."

"Remember that it concerns Carmela."

"I am well aware of it. But reflect that this rendezvous may conceal a snare."

"For what object?"

"Why, to seize you."

"Well, and what then?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, supposing that it is a trap, what will be the result of it?"

"In the first place that you will be a prisoner, and Texas will be deprived of one of her most devoted defenders. In short, in your place, I would not go; that is my brief and candid opinion. And," turning to his auditors, who had remained silent and motionless since their entrance, he asked them, "and you, senores, what do you think of it?"

"It would be madness for the Jaguar to trust a man he does not know, and whose intentions may be bad," said Lanzi.

"He must remain here," Quoniam backed his friend up.

"The antelope is the wildest of animals, and yet its instinct makes it escape the hunters," the Comanche chief said sententiously; "my brother will remain with his friends."

The Jaguar walked up and down the jacal with visible annoyance and febrile impatience, while each thus gave his opinion.

"No," he said, with some violence, as he suddenly stopped; "no, I will not abandon Dona Carmela when she claims my assistance, for it would be an act of cowardice, which I will not commit, whatever the consequences may be; I will go to the Cueva del Venado."

"You will reflect, my friend," John Davis remarked.

"My reflections are all made; I will save Dona Carmela, even at the risk of my life."

"You will not do that, my friend," the American continued gently.

"Why shall I not?"

"Because honor forbids you; because, besides the heart, there is duty; besides private feelings, public interests. Stationed at the rear-guard, you are responsible for the safety of the army; and if you are killed or made prisoner, the army is perhaps lost, or,

at any rate, in danger; that is why you will not do so, my friend."

The Jaguar let his head droop and sunk quite crushed into an equipal.

"What is to be done? My God! what is to be done?" he murmured in despair.

"Hope!" John Davis answered. And, making a signal to his friends, which the latter understood, for they immediately rose and left the hut, he continued:

"Jaguar, my friend, my brother, it is for me to restore your courage—you, a man with a lion's heart, and so strong in battle, whom adversity has never forced to bow his head! Do you dare to place your love for a woman and your devotion for the country on the same level? Do you dare to lament your lost love, Carmela, a prisoner, or even dead, when your native land is succumbing beneath the repeated blows of its oppressors? Do you forget that if you grow weak, or even hesitate to accomplish your glorious sacrifice, to-morrow, perhaps, that country which is so dear to you for so many reasons—which has shed its best and most precious blood in a hopeless struggle, will be buried eternally, by your fault, beneath the corpses of the last of its children? Brother, brother, the hour is supreme; we must conquer or die for the salvation of all. The general welfare must put down all paltry or selfish passions. To hesitate is to act as a traitor. Up, brother, and do not dishonor yourself by a cowardly weakness!"

The young man started up as if a serpent had stung him on hearing these harsh words; but he suddenly subdued the wild flash of his eye, while a sad smile covered his handsome face.

"Thanks, brother," he replied, as he seized John Davis's hand, and pressed it convulsively; "thanks for having reminded me of my duty. I will die at my post."

"Ah, I find you again at length," the American exclaimed joyfully. "I felt certain that your heart would not remain deaf to the call of duty, and that you would carry out your glorious sacrifice to the end."

The young man heaved a deep sigh; but he did not feel within him the strength to respond to the praise which in his heart he knew he did not deserve. At this moment the clang of arms and the sound of horses was audible without.

"What is the matter now?" the Jaguar asked.

"I do not know," the American answered; "but I fancy that we shall soon be informed."

In fact, the sentry had challenged; and, after an apparently satisfactory reply, a horseman entered the camp.

"A flag of truce," Lanzi said, appearing in the doorway of the jacal.

"A flag of truce!" the Jaguar repeated, giving John Davis a glance of surprise. "Let him enter."

"Come, señor," said the half-breed, addressing a person who was still invisible; "the commandant is ready to receive you."

Lanzi fell back, and made room for an individual who at once entered. The Jaguar started on recognizing him. It was Sandoval, who had delivered him the letter on the previous day. The pirate chief bowed politely to the two persons in whose presence he found himself.

"You are surprised to see me, I think, caballeros," he said with a smile to the Jaguar.

"I confess it," the latter said, with a bow no less polite than the one made to him.

"The matter is clear enough, however. I like a plain and distinct understanding. In the letter I delivered to you myself yesterday, I gave you the meeting at the Cueva del Venado, to discuss grave matters, as you will remember."

"I allow it."

"But," Sandoval continued, with the calmness and intrepid coolness that characterized him, "we had hardly separated ere I reflected that, as I had not the honor of your acquaintance, it might possibly happen that you would place in me all the confidence I deserve, and that you might leave me to kick my heels in the grotto."

"The two insurgents exchanged a smiling glance, which Sandoval intercepted."

"Ah, ah!" he said, with a laugh; "it appears that I guessed right. In short, as I repeat that we have serious matters to discuss, I resolved to come direct to you, and so cut this difficulty."

"You did well, and I thank you for it."

"It is not worth while, for I am working as much for myself as for you in this business."

"Be it so; but that does not render your conduct less honorable. Then you are not a flag of truce?"

"I'm not a bit in the world. It was merely a title I thought it better to assume, in order to find my way to you more easily."

"No matter; so long as you remain with us you shall be treated as such, so do not feel alarmed."

"I, alarmed! about what, pray? Am I not under the safeguard of your honor?"

"Thanks for the good opinion you are kind enough to have of me, and I will justify it. Now, if you think proper, we will come to the point."

"I ask nothing better," Sandoval answered, with some hesitation, and looking dubiously at the American.

"The caballero is my intimate friend," the Jaguar said, understanding his meaning; "you can speak frankly before him."

"Hum!" said Sandoval, with a toss of the head. "My mother, who was a holy woman, repeated to me frequently, that when two are enough to settle a matter, it is useless to call in a third."

"Your mother was right, my fine fellow," John Davis said, with a laugh; "and since you are so unwilling to have me as an auditor, I will retire."

"It is indifferent to me whether you hear me or not," Sandoval said, carelessly; "I only said so for the sake of the señor, who may not wish a third party to hear what I have to say."

"If that be really your sole motive," the Jaguar continued, "you can speak, for I repeat to you I have no secrets from this caballero."

"All right, then," said Sandoval.

He seated himself on an equipal, rolled a husk cigarette, lit it by the candle, whose light had become quite unnecessary, owing to the daylight becoming each moment brighter, and then turned easily to his two hearers.

"Senores," he said, puffing out a large quantity of smoke from his mouth and his nostrils, "it is as well for you to know that I am the recognized chief

of a numerous and brave band of banished men, or proscriptions, whichever you may call them, whom the so-called honest townfolk fancied they branded by calling them skinners of the savannah, or pirates of the prairies, both of which titles are equally false."

At this strange revelation, made with such cool cynicism, the two men gave a start, and regarded each other with considerable surprise. The pirate watched this double movement, and probably mentally satisfied with the effect he had produced, he continued:

"I have reasons that you should know my social position," he said, "for you to understand what is going to follow."

"Good," John Davis interrupted; "but what motive urged you to take the present step?"

"Two important reasons," Sandoval answered, distinctly; "the first is, that I wish to avenge myself; the second, the desire of gaining a large sum of money by selling you in the first battle, for the highest price I can obtain, the co-operation of the cuadrilla I have the honor to command, a cuadrilla composed of thirty well armed and mounted men."

"Now go on, but be brief, for the time presses."

"Do not be frightened, I am not fond of chattering; how much do you offer me for my cuadrilla?"

"I cannot personally make a bargain with you," the Jaguar said; "I must refer the matter to the general in chief."

"That is perfectly true."

"Still, you can tell me the price you ask; I will submit it to the general and he will decide."

"Very good; you will give me fifty thousand piastres,* half down, the rest after the battle is won. You see that I am not exorbitant in my demands."

"Your price is reasonable; but how can we communicate?"

"Nothing is easier; when you desire to speak to me you will fasten red pendants to the lances of your cavalry, and I will do the same when I have any important communication to make to you."

"That is settled; now for the other matter."

"It is this: one day a monk of the name of Fray Antonio sent me a wounded man."

"The White Scalper?" John Davis exclaimed.

"Do you know him?" the pirate asked.

"Yes, but go on."

"He is a pretty scamp, I think?"

"I am quite of your opinion."

"Well, I greeted him as a brother and gave him the best I had; do you know what he did?"

"On my word, I do not."

"He tried to debauch my comrades and supplant me."

"Oh, oh! that was rather strong."

"Was it not? Fortunately I was watching, and managed to parry the blow; about this time General Santa Anna offered to engage us as a Free Corps."

"Oh!" the Jaguar uttered, in disgust.

"It was not very tempting," the pirate continued, being mistaken in the young man's exclamation, "but I had an idea."

"What was it?"

"The one I had the honor of explaining to you a moment back."

"Ah! very good."

"Hence, I selected thirty resolute men from my band and started to join the Mexican army; of course, you understand, I was paid."

"Of course, nothing could be more fair."

"I was careful to bring this demon of a man with me, for you can understand that I did not care to leave him behind."

"I should think so."

"We went on very quietly till a day or two back, when, in beating up the country, I captured a girl, who, only escorted by three men, who fled like cowards at the first shot, was trying to join the Texan army."

"Poor Carmela!" the Jaguar murmured.

"Do not pity her, but rejoice, on the contrary, that she fell into my hands; who knows what might have happened with any one else?"

"That is true, go on."

"I was willing enough to let the poor girl continue her journey, but the Scalper opposed it. It seemed that he knew her, for on seeing her he exclaimed—'Oh, oh! this time she shall not escape me; is that clear, eh?'"

The two men bowed their assent.

"However, the prisoner was mine, as I had captured her."

"Ah!" said the Jaguar, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes, and I would not consent to surrender her to the Scalper at any price."

"Good, very good! you are a worthy man."

The pirate smiled modestly.

"Yes," he said, "I am all right, but my comrade, seeing that I would not give up the girl to him, offered me a bargain."

"What was its nature?"

"To give me twenty-five gold onzas, on condition that I never restored my prisoner to liberty."

"And did you accept?" the Jaguar asked, eagerly.

"Hang it! business is business, and twenty ounces are a tidy sum."

"Villain!" the young man exclaimed, as he rose furiously.

John Davis restrained him, and made him sit down again.

"Patience," he said.

"Hum!" Sandoval muttered, "you are dencedly quick; I allow that I promised not to set her at liberty, but not to prevent her flight; did I not tell you that I was a man of ideas?"

"That is true."

"The girl interested me, she wept. It is very foolish, but I do not like to see women cry since the day when—but that is not the point,"—he caught himself up—"she told me her name and story; I was affected in spite of myself, and the more so, as I saw a prospect of taking my revenge."

"Then you propose to me to carry her off?"

"That's the very thing."

"How much do you want for that?"

"Nothing," the pirate answered with a magnificent gesture of disinterestedness.

"How, nothing?"

"Dear me, no."

"That is impossible."

* About £10,000.

"It is so, however, though I will propose two conditions."

"Ah! ah! there we have it."

The pirate smiled in reply.

"Let us hear them," the young man continued.

"In order not to compromise myself unnecessarily, you will carry off the girl during the first battle, when I come over to your side. Do not be frightened, it will not be long first, if I may believe certain forebodings."

"Good, that is granted. Now for the second."

"The second is, that you swear to free me from the White Scalper, and kill him, no matter in what way."

"Done again—I swear it. But now permit me one question."

"Out with it."

"How is it that as you hate this man so deeply, you have not killed him yourself, as there could have been no lack of opportunity?"

"Certainly not, I could have done it a hundred times."

"Well, why did you not do it?"

"Are you desirous of knowing?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was because the man has been my guest and slept under my roof by my side, eaten and drank at my table; but what it is not permitted me to do, others can do in my place. But now good-by, senores; when will you give me a definite answer?"

"This very evening! I shall have seen the general in a few hours."

"This evening, then."

And bowing politely to the two men, he quietly left the jacal, mounted his horse, and set out at a gallop, leaving the two men terrified at his imperturbable effrontery and profound perversity.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOYAL HEART'S HISTORY.

AFTER the scene of torture we described a few chapters back, Loyal Heart returned to his rancho with his friends, Tranquil, Lanzi, and the faithful Quoniam. Fray Antonio had left the village the same morning to convey to the Jaguar the news of the good reception given his companions by the Comanches. The whites sat down sorrowfully on equipals, and remained silent for some minutes. The horrible tortures inflicted on Running Elk had affected them more than they liked to say.

"Hum!" Quoniam muttered, "the red race is a brutal race."

"All races are the same," Tranquil answered, "when abandoned without restraint to the violence of their passions."

"The whites are men more cruel than the redskins," Loyal Heart observed, "because they act with discernment."

"That is true," John Davis struck in, "but that does not prevent the scene we have just witnessed being a horrible one."

"Yes," said Tranquil, "horrible is the word."

"Come," Loyal Heart remarked, for the purpose of changing the conversation, "did you not tell me, my friend, that you were intrusted with a message for me? I fancy the moment has arrived for an explanation."

"In truth, I have delayed too long in delivering it; besides, if my presentiments do not greatly deceive me, my return must be anxiously expected."

"Good! speak, nobody will disturb you; we have all the time necessary before us."

"Oh, what I have to say to you will not take long. I only wish to ask you to lay a final hand to a work for which you have already striven?"

"What is it?"

"I wish to claim your help in the war of Texas against Mexico."

The young hunter frowned, and for some minutes remained silent.

"Will you refuse?" Tranquil asked, anxiously.

Loyal Heart shook his head.

"No," he said; "I merely feel a repugnance to mingle again with white men, and—shall I confess it? to fight against my countrymen?"

"Your countrymen?"

"Yes, I am a Mexican, a native of Sonora."

"Oh!" the hunter said with an air of disappointment.

"Listen to me," Loyal Heart said, resolutely, "after all, it is better I should speak frankly to you; when you have heard me, you will judge and tell me what I ought to do."

"Good! speak, my friend."

"You have, I think, been several times surprised at seeing a white man, like myself, dwelling with his mother and an old servant among the Indian tribes; you have asked yourself what reason could be powerful enough, or what crime was sufficiently great, to compel a man like myself, of gentle manners, gifted with a pleasant exterior, and possessing some degree of education, to seek a refuge among savages? This appeared to you extraordinary. Well, my friend, the cause of my exile to these remote regions was a crime I committed; on the self-same day I became an incendiary and an assassin."

"Oh!" Tranquil exclaimed, while the other hearers gave an incredulous glance; "you an incendiary and assassin, Loyal Heart! it is impossible."

"I was not Loyal Heart then," the hunter continued with a melancholy smile; "but it is true that I was only a lad, just fourteen years of age. My father was a Spaniard of the old race, with whom honor was a sacred inheritance, which he ever kept intact. He succeeded in saving me from the hands of the Juez de Letras, who had come to arrest me; and when the magistrate had left the house, my father assembled his tenants, formed a court, which he constituted himself president, and tried me. My crime was evident, the proofs overwhelming, and my father himself uttered my sentence in a firm voice: I was condemned to death."

"To death!" his hearers exclaimed, with a start of horror.

"To death!" Loyal Heart repeated. "The sentence was a just one. Neither the supplications of his servants, nor the tears nor entreaties of my mother, succeeded in obtaining a commutation of my punishment. My father was inexorable, his resolution was formed, and he immediately proceeded to execute the sentence. The death my father reserved for me was not that vulgar death, whose sufferings endure a few seconds; no, he had said that he had determined to punish me, and

designed a long and cruel agony for me. Tearing me from the arms of mother, who was half fainting with grief, he threw me across his saddle-bow, and started at a gallop in the direction of the desert.

"It was a long journey, or it lasted many hours ere my father checked the speed of his horse or uttered a syllable. I felt the trembling sinews of the wearied horse give way under me; but still it went on at the same rapid and dizzy speed. At length it stopped; my father dismounted, took me in his arms, and threw me on the ground. Within a moment he removed the bandage that covered my eyes; I looked anxiously around me, but it was night, and so dark that I could see nothing. My father regarded me for a moment with an indefinable expression, and then spoke. Although many long years have elapsed since that terrible night, all the words of that address are still imprinted on my mind.

"See," he said to me in a quick voice, "you are here more than twenty leagues from my hacienda, in which you will never set foot again, under penalty of death. From this moment you are alone—you have neither father, nor mother, nor family. As you are a wild beast, I condemn you to live with the wild beasts. My resolution is irrevocable, your entreaties cannot alter it, so spare me them."

Perhaps in the last sentence a hope was concealed; but I was no longer in a condition to see the road left open for me, for irritation and suffering had exasperated me.

"I do not implore you," I replied; "we do not offer entreaties to a hangman."

"At this insulting outrage, my father started; but almost immediately after every trace of emotion disappeared from his face, and he continued:

"In this bag," he said, to a rather large pouch thrown down by my side, "are provisions for two days; I leave you this rifle, which in my hand never missed its mark; I give you also these pistols, this machete, knife, and ax, and gunpowder and bullets in these buffalo horns. You will find in the provision bag a flint and steel, and everything necessary for lighting a fire; I have also placed in it a Bible that belonged to your mother. You are dead to society, where you must never return; the desert is before, and it belongs to you; for my part, I have no longer a son—farewell! May the Lord have mercy on you! all is finished between us on this earth; you are left alone and without family; you have a second existence to begin, and to provide for your wants. Providence never abandons those who place their trust in it; henceforth it will watch over you."

"After uttering these words coldly and distinctly, to which I listened with deep attention, my father cut with his knife the bonds that held my limbs captive, and leaping into the saddle, started at a gallop without once turning his head. I was alone, abandoned in the desert in the midst of darkness, without hope of help from anywhere. A strange revolution then took place in me, and I felt the full extent of the crime I had committed; my heart broke at the thought of the solitude to which I was condemned; I got up on my knees, watching the fatal outline that was constantly getting further from me, and listened to the hurried gallop of the horse with feverish anxiety. And then, when I could hear no more, when all noise had died out in the distance, I felt a furious grief wither my heart; my courage all at once abandoned me, and I was afraid; then, clasping my hands with an effort, I exclaimed twice in a choking voice:

"Oh, my mother—my mother!"

"Succumbing to terror and despair, I fell back on the sand and fainted."

There was a moment's silence. These men, though accustomed to the affecting incidents of their rough life, felt moved to pity at this simple and yet so striking recital. The hunter's mother and his old servant had silently joined the hearers, while the dogs, lying at his feet licked his hands. The young man had let his head sink on his chest, and hid his face in his hands, for he was suffering from terrible emotion. No one dared to risk a word of consolation, and a mournful silence prevailed in the rancho; at length Loyal Heart raised his head again.

"How long I thus remained unconscious," he continued in a broken voice, "I never knew; a feeling of coolness I suddenly experienced made me open my eyes; the abundant morning dew, by inundating my face, had recalled me to life. As I was frozen, my first care was to collect some dry branches and light a fire to warm me; then I began reflecting.

"When a great suffering does not kill on the spot, a reaction immediately takes place; courage and will resume their empire, and the heart is strengthened. In a few moments I regarded my position as less desperate. I was alone in the desert, it was true; but though still very young—I was hardly fourteen—I was tall and strong, gifted with a firm character like my father, extremely tenacious in my ideas and will; I had weapons, ammunition and provisions, and my position was, therefore, far from being desperate; frequently, when I had been living at my father's hacienda, I had gone hunting with the tigero and vaqueros of the house, and during these hunts had slept under the open air in the woods; I was now about to begin a fresh hunt, though this time it would be much longer and last for life. For a moment I had the thought of returning to the hacienda and throwing myself at my father's knees; but I knew his inflexible character, and feared being ignominiously expelled a second time. My pride revolted, and I repulsed this thought, which was, perhaps, a divine inspiration.

"Still, being slightly comforted by the reflections I had just made, and crushed by the poignant emotions of the last few hours, I at length yielded to sleep, that imperious need of lads of my age, and fell off, after throwing wood on the fire to make it last as long as possible. The night passed without any incident, and at daybreak I awoke. It was the first time I saw the sun rise in the desert, and the majestic and grand spectacle I now had before me filled me with admiration.

"This desert, which seemed to me so gloomy and desolate in the darkness, assumed an enchanting aspect in the dazzling sunbeams. The night had taken with it all its gloomy fancies. The morning breeze and the sharp odors exhaled from the ground inflated my chest, and made me feel wondrously comforted: I fell on my knees, and with eyes and hands raised to Heaven, offered up an ardent prayer.

"This duty accomplished, I felt stronger, and rose

with an infinite sense of confidence and hope in the future. I was young and strong; around me the birds twittered gayly, the deer and the antelope bounded carelessly across the savanna. That God, who protected these innocent and weak creatures, would not abandon me, I felt, if by sincere repentance I rendered myself worthy of His protection, whose goodness is infinite. After making a light meal, I put my weapons in my belt, threw my bag on one shoulder, my rifle on the other, and after looking back for the last time with a sigh of regret I set out, murmuring the name of my mother—that name which would henceforth be my sole talisman, and serve me in good as in evil fortune.

"My first march was long; for I proceeded toward a forest which I saw glistening in the horizon, and wished to reach before sunset. Nothing hurried me, but I wished at once to discover my strength, and know of what I was capable. Two hours before nightfall I reached the spurs of the forest, and was soon lost in the ocean of verdure. My father's tigero, an old wood-ranger, who had left his foot-marks in every American desert, had told me during the long hunting nights we have spent together, many of his adventures on the prairies, thus giving me, though neither of us suspected it at the time, lessons which the moment had now arrived for me to profit by.

"I formed my bivouac on the top of the hill, lit a large fire, and after supping with good appetite, said my prayer and fell asleep. All at once I woke up with a start; two rastros were licking my hands with whines of joy, while my mother and my old Eusebio were bending over and carefully examining me, not knowing whether I were asleep or in a fainting-fit.

"Heaven be praised!" my mother exclaimed; "he is not dead."

"I could not express the happiness that suddenly flooded my soul at the sight of my mother, whom I never hoped to see again in this world, at my pressing to her heart, and hanging round her neck, as if afraid she would escape me again. I gave way to a feeling of immense joy; when our transports were somewhat calmed, my mother said to me:

"And now, what do you intend doing? We shall return to the hacienda, shall we not? Oh! if you but knew how I suffered through your absence!"

"Return to the hacienda?" I repeated.

"Yes; your father, I am certain, will pardon you, if he has not done so already in his heart." And while saying this, my mother looked at me anxiously, and redoubled her caresses.

"I remained silent.

"Why do you not answer me, my child?" she said to me.

"I made a violent effort over myself. 'Mother,' I at length answered, 'the mere thought of a separation fills my heart with sorrow and bitterness. But before I inform you of my resolution, answer me frankly one thing.

"Speak, my child."

"Has my father sent you to me?"

"No," she answered sorrowfully.

"But, at any rate, you believe that he approves the step you are now taking?"

"I do not believe," she said, with even greater sorrow than before, for she foresaw what was about to happen.

"Well, my mother," I answered, "God will judge me. My father has denied me, he has abandoned me in the desert. I no longer exist for him, as he himself told me—and I am dead to all the world. I will never set foot in the hacienda again, unless God and my father forgive my crime—and I am able to forgive myself. A new existence commences for me from to-day. Who can say whether the Deity, in permitting this great expiation, may not have secret designs with me? His will be done—my resolution is immovable."

"My mother looked at me fixedly for a moment; she knew that once I had categorically expressed my will, I never recalled my words. Two tears silently coursed down her pale cheeks. 'The will of God be done,' she said; 'we will remain, then, in the desert.'

"What!" I exclaimed, with joyous surprise, "do you consent to remain with me?"

"Am I not thy mother?" she said, with an accent of ineffable kindness, as she pressed me madly to her heart."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE EXPIATION.

OUTSIDE the rancho the yells of the Comanches still went on. After a momentary silence, Loyal Heart continued his narrative, which emotion had compelled him to interrupt.

"It was in vain," he said, "that I implored my mother to leave me to the care of Heaven, and return to the hacienda with No Eusebio. Her resolution was formed—she was inflexible.

"Ever since I married your father," she said to me, "however unjust or extraordinary his demands might be, he found in me rather a submissive and devoted slave, than a wife whose rights were equal to his. A complaint has never passed my lips; I have never attempted to oppose one of his wishes. But to-day the measure is full; by exiling you as he has done, coldly repulsing my prayers, and despising my tears, he has at length allowed me to read his heart, and the little egotism and cruel pride by which he allows himself to be governed. This man who coldly and deliberately had the barbarity to do what he has done to the first-born of his children, possesses not the spark of good feeling. The condemnation he pronounced against you, I pronounce, in my turn, against him."

"Like all timid natures, accustomed to bow their heads timidly beneath the yoke, my mother, when the spirit of revolt entered her heart, assumed an obstinacy at the least equal to her ordinary docility. The way in which she uttered those words proved to me that all my prayers would be useless, and that it was better to yield to her determination. I therefore turned to No Eusebio; but at the first word I addressed to him the worthy man laughed in my face, saying distinctly and peremptorily that he had seen me born and meant to see me die.

"As there was nothing to be gained on this side, I gave up the contest. I merely observed to my mother that, so soon as my father noticed her departure, he would probably start, at the head of all his tenants in pursuit of her, and that we should be

inevitably discovered if we did not start at once. My mother and No Eusebio had come on horseback, but unhappily one of the animals had foundered, and was incapable of following us; saddle and bridle were removed, and we left it to its fate; my mother mounted the other horse, No Eusebio and myself followed on foot, while the rastros cleared the way.

"We knew not whither we were going, and did not trouble ourselves at all about it; Iains succeeded forests, streams rivers, and we continued our forward march, hunting to support life, and camping wherever night surprised us, without regret for the past or anxiety for the future. We advanced thus straight ahead for nearly a month, avoiding, as far as possible, an encounter with the wild beasts or the savages, whom we believed to be as ferocious as them.

"One day—a Sunday—the march was interrupted, and we spent it in pious conversation, and my mother read the Bible and explained it to No Eusebio and myself. About three in the afternoon, when the great heat of the day was beginning to yield, I rose and took my gun, with the intention of killing a little game, as our provisions were nearly exhausted, and I was absolutely compelled to renew them. My mother made no objection, though, as I have stated, Sundays were generally consecrated to rest; and I went off with the two rastros. I went on for a long distance without seeing anything deserving powder and shot, and was thinking of turning back, when my two dogs, which were running on ahead, came to a halt, while evidencing unusual signs of terror and restlessness.

"Although I was still a novice in the wood-ranger's art, I judged it necessary to act with prudence, as I did not know what enemy I might find before me. I therefore advanced step by step, watching the neighborhood closely, and listening to the slightest noise. My uncertainty did not last long, for terrible cries soon reached my ear. My first impulse was flight, but my curiosity restrained me, and, cocking my rifle, so as to be ready for all events, I continued to advance in the direction whence the cries came.

"Ere long all was revealed to me; I perceived through the trees, in a rather spacious clearing, five or six Indian warriors, fighting with the fury of despair, against a three-fold number of enemies. These Indians had doubtless been surprised in their camp, for their horses were hopped, their fire was just going out, and several corpses, already robbed of their scalps, lay on the ground.

"The Indian who appeared the chief of the weaker party, was a tall young man, of twenty at the most, powerfully built, with a leonine face, and who, while dealing terrible blows, did not cease exciting his men to resist to the death. Neither of the parties had fire-arms, they were fighting with axes and long-barbed lances. All at once, several men rushed simultaneously on the young chief, and, despite his desperate efforts, succeeded in throwing him down, then a hand seized his long scalp-lock, and I saw a knife raised above his head.

"I know not what I felt on seeing this, or what dizziness seized upon me, but, by a mechanical movement, I raised my rifle and fired; then, rushing into the clearing with loud cries, I discharged my pistols at the men nearest to me. An extraordinary thing occurred, which I was far from expecting, and certainly had not foreseen. The Indians, terrified by my three shots, followed by my sudden apparition, believed that help was arriving to their adversaries, and without dreaming of resisting, they began flying with that intuitive rapidity peculiar to Indians, at the first repulse they meet with.

"I thus found myself alone with those I came to deliver. It was the first time I had been engaged in a fight, if such a name can be given to the bare I took in the struggle, and I felt that emotion inseparable from a first event of this nature; I neither saw nor heard anything. I was standing in the center of the clearing, like a statue, not knowing whether to advance or retire, flanked by my two bloodhounds, which had not left me.

"I know not who was the first to say that ingratitude was a white vice, and prudence an Indian virtue; but, whoever he was, he spoke the truth. The chief I had so miraculously saved, and his comrades, pressed around me, and began overwhelming me with marks of respect and gratitude. Let it be so, mechanically replying as well as I could, in Spanish, to the compliments the Indians lavished on me in their sonorous language, of which I did not understand a syllable. When a little while had elapsed, and their joy was beginning to grow more sedate, the chief, who had been slightly wounded in the fight, made me sit down by the fire, while his comrades conscientiously raised the scalps of their enemy who had fallen, and he began questioning me in Spanish, which language he spoke clearly.

"After warmly thanking me, and repeating several times that I was a great brave, he told me that his name was Nocobotha, that is to say, the Tempest; that he belonged to the great and powerful nation of the Comanches, surnamed the Queen of the Prairies, and was related to a renowned sachem called Black-deer. Having set out with a few warriors to chase antelopes, he had been surprised by a detachment of Apaches, the sworn enemies of his nation, and if the Master of Life had not brought me to their help, he and his comrades would infallibly have succumbed, an opinion the justice of which I was compelled to recognize. The chief then asked me who I was, saying to me that he should henceforth regard me as his brother, that he wished to conduct me to his tribe, and that he would never consent to separate from the man who had saved his life.

"Nocobotha's words suggested an idea to me; I was greatly alarmed about the existence I led, not for myself, for this free and unrestrained life charmed me to the highest degree, but for my poor mother, who, accustomed to all the comforts of civilization, would not, I feared, endure for long the fatigues she undertook through her affection for me. I immediately resolved to profit by the gratitude and good-will of my new acquaintance, to obtain my mother an asylum, where, if she did not find the comfort she had lost, she would run no risk of dying of want. I therefore frankly told Nocobotha the situation I was placed in, and by what accident I had providentially arrived just in time to save his scalp. The chief listened to me with the most earnest attention.

"Good," he said with a smile, when I had ended,

and squeezed my hand. 'Nocobotha is the brother of Loyal Heart. (Such was the name he gave me, and I have retained ever since.) Loyal Heart's mother will have two sons.'

"I thanked the chief, as I was bound to do, and remarked to him that, as I had now left my mother for some time, I was afraid she might feel alarmed at my lengthened absence, and that, if he permitted me, I would return to her side to reassure her, and tell her all that had happened; but the Comanche shook his head.

"Nocobotha will accompany his brother," he said; 'he does not wish to leave him.'

"I accept the proposition, and we at once started to return to my encampment. We did not take long in going, for we were mounted; but on seeing me arrive with six or seven Indians, my poor mother was terribly alarmed, for she fancied me a prisoner, and menaced with the most frightful punishment. I soon succeeded, however, in reassuring her, and her terror was converted into joy on hearing the good tidings I brought her. Moreover, Nocobotha, with that graceful politeness innate in Indians, soon entirely comforted, and managed to gain her good graces. Such, my dear Tranquil, is the manner in which I became a wood-ranger, trapper, and hunter.

"On reaching the tribe, the Indians received me as a friend, a brother. These simple and kind men knew not how to prove their friendship. For my part, on growing to know them better, I began to love them as if they had been my brothers. I was adopted by the sachems collected round the council fire, and from that moment regarded as a child of the nation. From this time I did not leave the Comanches again. All longed to install me into the secrets of desert life. My progress was rapid, and I was soon renowned as one of the best and bravest hunters of the tribes. In several meetings with the enemy, I had opportunities to render them signal service. My influence increased; and now I am not only a warrior but a sachem, respected and beloved by all. Nocobotha, that noble lad, whom his courage ever bore to the front, at length fell in an ambush formed by the Apaches. After an obstinate struggle, I managed to bear him home, though covered with wounds. I was myself dangerously wounded. On reaching the village I fell senseless with my precious burden. In spite of the most devoted and assiduous care my mother lavished on my poor brother, she was unable to save him, and he died thanking me for not having left him in the hands of his foes, and having kept his scalp from being raised, which is the greatest disgrace for a Comanche warrior.

"In spite of the marks of friendship and sympathy the sachems did not cease to bestow on me for the manner in which I had defended my brother, I was for a long time inconsolable at his loss; and even now, though so long a period has elapsed since that frightful catastrophe, I cannot speak of him without tears coming into my eyes.

"Now, my dear Tranquil, you know my life as well as I do myself. My kind and revered mother, honored by the Indians, to whom she is a visible Providence, is happy, or at least seems to be so. I have completely forgotten my color, to live the life of the red-skins, who, when my brethren spurned me, received me as a son, and their friendship has never failed me. I only remember my origin when I have to assist any unhappy man of my own complexion. The white trappers and hunters of these regions affect, I know not why, to regard me as their chief, and eagerly seize the opportunity to show me their respect, whenever it offers. I am therefore in a position relatively enviable; and yet, the more years slip away, the more lively does the memory of the events that brought me to the desert recur to my mind, and the more I fear never to obtain the pardon of my crimes."

He was silent. The hunters looked at each other with a mingled feeling of admiration and respect for this man, who confessed so simply a crime which so many others would have regarded at the utmost as a peccadillo, and who repented of it so sincerely. "By Jove!" Tranquil exclaimed all at once, "Heaven will be careful not to pardon you if it has not been done so long ago. Men like you are somewhat rare in the desert, comrade!"

Loyal Heart smiled gently at this simple outburst of the hunter.

"Come, my friend, now that you know me thoroughly, give me your advice frankly; whatever it may be, I promise you to follow it."

"Well, my advice is very simple; it is that you should come with us."

"But I tell you I am a Mexican."

The Canadian burst into a laugh.

"Eh, eh," he said; "I fancied you stronger than that, on my honor."

"What do you mean?"

"Hang it, it is as clear as day. What is Mexico?"

"It is a confederation."

"Very good; that is to say, Mexico is a republic, formed of several Confederate States."

"Yes," Loyal Heart said, with a smile.

"Better still; then Sonora and Texas, for instance, are free States, and able to separate from the Confederation, if they think proper?"

"Ah, ah," said Loyal Heart, "I did not expect that."

"I thought you did not. Well, you see, my friend, that the Mexico of to-day, which is neither that of Montezuma nor that of the Spaniards, since the first merely comprised the plateau of Mexico, and the second, under the name of New Spain, a part of central America, is only indirectly your country, since you were born neither in Mexico nor Vera Cruz, but in Sonora. You said so yourself. Hence, if you, a Sonorian, assist the Texans, you only follow the general example, and are no traitor to your country. What have you to answer to that?"

"Nothing; save that your reasoning, though specious, is not without a certain amount of logic."

"Which means that you are convinced?"

"Not the least in the world. Still, I accept your proposition, and will do what you wish."

"That is a conclusion I was far from expecting, after the beginning of your sentence."

"Because, under the Texan idea, there is another, and it is that I wish to help you in carrying out."

"Ah!" the Canadian remarked, in surprise.

Loyal Heart bent over to him.

"Have you not a certain affair to settle with the White Scalper, or have you forgotten it?"

The hunter started, and warmly pressed the young man's hand.

"Thanks," he said.

At this moment Black-deer entered the rancho.

"I wish to speak with my brother," he said to Loyal Heart.

"Is my brother willing to speak before my friends the pale hunters?"

"The pale hunters are the guests of the Comanches; Black-deer will speak before them," the chief answered.

CHAPTER XXIV. IN THE DESERT.

THE news Black-deer brought must be very important, for, in spite of that stoicism which the Indians regard as a law, the chief's face was imprinted with the most lively anxiety. After sitting down at an equal to which Loyal Heart pointed, instead of speaking, as he had been invited to do, he remained gloomy and silent. The hunters looked at him curiously, waiting with impatience till he thought proper to explain. At length Loyal Heart, seeing that he obstinately remained silent, resolved to address him.

"What is the matter, chief?" he asked him. "Whence comes the anxiety I see on your features? What new misfortune have you to announce?"

"An enormous misfortune," he answered, in a hollow voice; "the prisoner has escaped."

"What prisoner?"

"The son of Blue-fox."

The hunters gave a start of surprise. "It is impossible," Loyal Heart said; "did he not surrender himself as an hostage? did he not pledge his word? and an Indian warrior never breaks that; only white men do so," he added, bitterly.

Black-deer looked down in embarrassment.

"Come," Loyal Heart went on, "let us be frank, chief; tell us clearly what things happened."

"The prisoner was bound and placed in the great medicine-lodge."

"What!" Loyal Heart exclaimed, in indignation; "a hostage bound and imprisoned! you are mistaken, chief, the sachems have not done such a thing, or thus insulted a young man protected by the law of nations."

"I related things exactly as they happened, Loyal Heart."

"And who gave the order?"

"I," the chief muttered.

"The hate you feel for Blue-fox led you astray, Black-deer; you committed a great fault in despising the word pledged by this young man, by treating him as a prisoner you gave him the right to escape; the opportunity offered itself, he profited by it, and acted rightly."

"My young men are on his trail," the chief said, with a hateful smile.

"Your young men will not capture him, for he has fled with the feet of the gazelle."

"Is the misfortune irreparable, then?"

"Perhaps not. Listen to me: one way is left us of capturing our enemy again. The pale hunters, my brothers, have asked my help in the war the whites are carrying on at this moment against each other; ask of the council of the chiefs one hundred picked warriors, whom I will command, and you can accompany me; to-morrow at sunset we will set out; the Apaches are burning to take their revenge for the defeat we inflicted on them, so be assured that ere we join our brothers the pale-faces, we shall see our road barred by Blue-fox and his warriors. This is the only chance left us to finish with this implacable enemy—do you accept it?"

"I do accept it, Loyal Heart; your medicine is good, it has never deceived you, the words your chest utters are inspired by the Wacondah!" the chief said, eagerly, as he rose. "I am going to the council of the chiefs, will you accompany me?"

"What to do? It is better that the proposition should come from you, Black-deer, for I am only an adopted son of the tribe."

"Good, I will do what my brother desires; I will return shortly."

"You see, my friend," Loyal Heart said to Tranquil, when the chief had left, "that I have not delayed in fulfilling my promises; perhaps of the hundred warriors we take with us one half will remain on the way, but the survivors will not be the less of great assistance to you."

"Thanks, my friend," Tranquil answered; "you know that I have faith in you."

As Loyal Heart had foreseen, the Indian warriors sent in pursuit of the prisoner returned to the village without him; they had beaten up the country in vain, the whole night through, without discovering any trace of his passage. The young man had disappeared from the medicine-lodge, and it was impossible to find out what means he had employed to effect his escape. The only remark the Comanches made—but it had considerable importance—was that, at a spot in the forest exactly opposite to that where the battle with the Apaches had taken place, the soil was trampled and the bark of the trees nibbled, as if several horses had been standing there for some time, but there was no mark of human feet.

The warriors, consequently, returned completely disappointed, and thus augmented the anger of their countrymen. The moment was well selected for the request Black-deer wished to make of the council of sachems. He requested the expedition projected by Loyal Heart, not as an intervention in favor of the whites, for that was only secondary, but as an experiment he desired to attempt, not merely to recapture the fugitive, but his father, who, doubtless, would be posted in ambush at a little distance from the village. As the question thus brought before them was acceptable, the sachems authorized Black-deer to select one hundred of the most renowned warriors of the nation, who would make the expedition under his orders and those of Loyal Heart.

Black-deer spoke to the hachesto, who mounted on the roof of a calli and immediately convened the members of the tribe. When the braves knew that an expedition was meditated, under the command of two such renowned chiefs, they eagerly offered to join the war-party, so that the chief really had a difficulty in selection. Shortly before sunset one hundred horsemen, armed with lances, guns, axes,

and knives, wearing their war moccasins, from the heel of which hung numerous coyote tails, and having round their neck their long licochetas, or war-whistles, made of human thigh-bone, formed one imposing squadron, drawn up in the finest order on the village square, in front of the ark of the first man. These savage warriors, with their symbolic paint and quaint dresses, offered a strange and terrific appearance.

When the white hunters ranged themselves by their side they were greeted with shouts of joy and unanimous applause. Loyal Heart and Black-deer placed themselves at the head of the band, the eldest sachems advanced and saluted the departing warriors, and at a signal from Loyal Heart the troop defiled at a walking pace before the members of the council and quitted the village.

At the moment when they entered the plain the sun was setting in a mass of purple and golden clouds. Once on the war-trail the detachment fell into Indian file, the deepest silence prevailed in the ranks, and they advanced rapidly in the direction of the forest. The Indians, when they start on a dangerous expedition, always throw out as flankers intelligent men, ordered to discover the enemy and protect the detachment from any surprise. These spies are changed every day, and, though aloof, they always keep a great distance ahead and on the flanks of the body they have undertaken to lead.

During the first fortnight the march of the Comanches was in no way disquieted, and the scouts, since they left the village, had discovered no human trail. The only individuals they met were peaceful hunters, traveling with their squaws, dogs, and children, and returning to their village; all agreed with the statement that they had seen no suspicious trail. Two days after, the Comanches entered on Texan territory.

This apparent tranquillity greatly perturbed the two chiefs of the detachment; they fancied themselves too well acquainted with the vindictive character of the Apaches to suppose that they would let them travel thus peacefully without attempting to check them. Tranquil, too, who had long known Blue-fox, completely shared their opinion. One evening the Comanches, after making a long day's march, bivouacked on the banks of a small stream upon the top of a wooded hill which commanded the course of the river and the surrounding country. As usual, the scouts had returned with the assertion that they had discovered no sign; when supper was over, Loyal Heart himself stationed the sentries, and each prepared to enjoy, during a few hours, a repose which the fatigues of the day rendered not only agreeable, but necessary.

Still, Tranquil, agitated by a secret presentiment, felt a feverish and apparently causeless anxiety which robbed him of sleep; in vain did he close his eyes with the firm intention of sleeping, they opened again in spite of his will; wearied with this sleeplessness, for which he could find no plausible reason, the hunter rose, resolved to keep awake and take a turn in the neighborhood. The movement he made in picking up his rifle woke Loyal Heart.

"What is the matter?" he asked at once.

"Nothing, nothing," the hunter answered, "go to sleep."

"Then why do you get up?"

"Because I cannot sleep, that's all, and intend to profit by my wakefulness to take a walk round the camp."

These words completely aroused Loyal Heart, for Tranquil was not the man to do anything without powerful reasons.

"Come, my friend," he said to him, "there is something, tell me."

"I know nothing," the hunter answered, "but I am sad and restless; in a word, I know not what I fancy, but I cannot help thinking an approaching danger menaces us; what it is I cannot say, but I noticed to-day two flocks of flamingoes flying against the wind, several antelopes, deers and other animals running madly in the same direction; the whole day through I have not heard a single bird sing, and as that is not natural I am alarmed."

"Alarmed?" Loyal Heart said, with a laugh.

"Alarmed of a snare, and that is why I wish to make a round; I suppose I shall discover nothing; I believe and hope it, but no matter, I shall at any rate be certain that we have nothing to fear."

Loyal Heart, without saying a word, wrapped himself in his zarape and seized his rifle.

"Let us go," he said.

"What do you mean?" the hunter asked.

"I am going with you."

"What nonsense! my undertaking is only the fancy of a sick brain; do you remain here and rest yourself."

"No, no," Loyal Heart answered, with a shake of his head, "I think exactly the same as you have just told me; I also feel anxious, I know not why, and wish to be certain."

"In that case come along; perhaps, after all, it will be the better course."

The two men quitted the bivouac. The night was fresh and light, the atmosphere extremely transparent, the sky studded with stars, the moon seemed floating in ether, and its light combined with that of the stars, was so great, that objects were as visible as in open day. A profound calm trooded over the landscape, which the hunters could perfectly survey from the elevation on which they were standing; at times a mysterious breath passed over the leafy tops of the trees, which it bent with a hoarse murmur. Tranquil and Loyal Heart carefully examined the plain which stretched an enormous distance before them. Suddenly the Canadian seized his friend's arms, and by a sharp and irresistible movement, drew him behind the trunk of an enormous larch tree.

"What is it?" the hunter asked eagerly.

"Look!" his comrade answered laconically, as he stretched out his arm in the direction of the plain.

"Oh, oh, what does that mean?" the young man muttered a moment later.

"It means that I was not mistaken, and that we shall have a fight, but fortunately this time again it will be diamond cut diamond; warn John Davis, and let him take the villains in the rear, while we face them."

"There is not a moment to be lost," Loyal Heart muttered, and he bounded toward the camp.

The two experienced hunters had noticed a thing which would certainly have been passed over by the

eyes of men less habituated to Indian customs. We have said that at intervals a capricious breeze passed over the tops of the trees; this breeze blew from the south-west over the plain for a distance of some few hundred yards, and yet the same breeze ran along the tall grass, incessantly approaching the hill where the Comanches were encamped, but, extraordinary to say, it blew from the north-east, or a direction diametrically opposed to the former. This was all the hunters had perceived, and yet it sufficed them to guess the stratagem of their foes, and foil it.

Five minutes later, sixty Comanches, commanded by Tranquil and Loyal heart, crawled like serpents down the sides of the hill, and on reaching the plain stood motionless, as if converted into statues. John Davis, with the rest of the band, turned the hill. All at once a terrible cry was heard—the Comanches rose like a legion of demons, and rushed headlong on their enemies. The latter hesitated for a moment, and then, terrified by this sudden attack turned to fly, but behind them rose suddenly the American's band.

They must fight, or surrender to the mercy of an implacable foe; hence the Apaches closed up shoulder to shoulder, and the butchery commenced. It was horrible, and lasted till day. These deadly enemies fought without uttering a cry, and fell without uttering a sigh. As the Apaches fell, their comrades drew closer together, while the Comanches contracted the circle of steel in which they were inclosed.

The sun, on rising, illuminated a horrible scene of carnage: forty Comanches had fallen, while of the Apaches ten men, all more or less severely wounded, alone stood upright. Loyal Heart turned away in sorrow from this fearful sight, for it would have been useless for him to interfere to save the last victims. The Comanches, intoxicated by the smell of blood and powder, furious at the resistance their enemies had offered, did not listen to his orders, and the remaining Apaches were killed and scalped.

"Ah!" Black-deer exclaimed, pointing with a gesture of triumph at the mutilated and almost unrecognizable corpse, "the sachems will be pleased, for Blue-fox is dead at last."

In truth, the formidable chief lay on a pile of Comanche corpses; his body was literally covered with wounds, and his son, a poor lad scarce adolescent yet, was lying at his feet. Curiously enough, for the Indians only take the scalps of their enemies usually, a fresh cut-off head was fastened to the chief's girdle—it was that of Fray Antonio. The poor monk, who had quitted the village a few days before Tranquil, had doubtless been surprised and massacred by the Apaches.

So soon as the carnage, for we cannot call it a battle, was over, the Indians prepared to pay the last rites to those of their friends who had found death in this sanguinary struggle. Deep graves were dug, and the bodies were thrown in without the usual funeral ceremonies, which circumstances prevented; still, they were careful to bury their arms with them, and then stones were piled on the graves to defend them from wild beasts. As for the Apaches, they were left at the spot where they had fallen. After this, the war-party started again sadly for Texas.

CHAPTER XXV. THE LAST HALT.

We will now lead the reader to the extreme outposts of the Mexican army. This army, six thousand strong on its entrance into Texas, now amounted to no more than fifteen hundred, including a reinforcement of five hundred men, which General Cos had just brought up. The successive victories gained by Santa Anna over the Texans had therefore cost him just five thousand men. This negative triumph caused the President of the Mexican Republic considerable reflection. He began to understand the extraordinary difficulties of this war against an exasperated people, and he speculated with terror on the terrible consequences a defeat would have for him, if those intractable enemies he had been pursuing so long resolved at last to wait for him and succeeded in defeating him. Unluckily, whatever Santa Anna's apprehensions might be, it was too late to withdraw, and he must try his fortune to the end.

A space of five leagues at the most separated the two belligerent armies, and that space was diminished nearly one-half by the position of their vedettes. The vanguard of the Mexican army, composed of two hundred regulars, was commanded by Colonel Melendez, but a league further ahead was encamped a forlorn hope, which had to clear the way for the movements of the army. These were simply the pirates of the prairies, commanded by our old acquaintance Sandoval, whom we saw a short time back introduce himself to the Jaguar, and make so singular a bargain with him.

In spite of the extremely slight esteem in which the Mexican army held the honesty of the said Sandoval and his myrmidons, General Santa Anna found himself constrained to place a certain amount of confidence in these thorough scoundrels, owing to their incontestable capability as guides, and above all, as flankers. The general, consequently, found himself obliged almost to close his eyes to the crimes they committed almost daily, and to let them act as they pleased.

These worthy men, then, were bivouacked, as we have said, about a league in advance of the Mexican army, and as they liked to take their ease whenever the opportunity offered, they had found nothing better than quartering themselves in a pueblo, whose inhabitants had naturally fled at their approach, and the houses of which the pirates pulled down to procure wood for their camp-fires. Still, either by accident or some other reason, one house, or rather hut, had escaped the general ruin, and alone remained standing. It was not only untouched, but shut up, and a sentry was stationed before the door. This sentry, however, did not appear to trouble himself much about the orders given him; for being probably annoyed by the sun, whose beams fell vertically on his head, he was lying cosily in the shade of a stall luckily standing opposite the house, and with his musket within reach, was smoking, sleeping, and dreaming, while waiting till his term of duty was over, and a comrade came to take his place.

As this house served at this moment as the abode

of Dona Carmela, we will ask the reader to enter it with us. The maiden, sad and pensive, was reclining in a hammock suspended before a window, open, in spite of the heat of the day, and her eyes, red with weeping, were invariably fixed on the desolate plain, which the sun parched, and whose sand flashed like diamonds. Of what was the poor girl thinking, while the tears she did not dream of wiping away, coursed down her pallid cheeks.

Perhaps at this age, when recollections do not go back beyond yesterday, she remembered in bitterness of spirit the happy days of the Venta del Potrero, where with Tranquil and Lanzi, those two devoted hearts to protect her, all smiled upon her, and the future appeared to her so gentle and calm. Perhaps, too, she thought of the Jaguar, for whom she felt such friendship, or of Colonel Melendez, whose respectful and profound love had made her so often dream involuntarily, in the way maidens dream.

But, alas! all this had now faded away; farewell to the exquisite dreams! where were Tranquil and Lanzi, the Jaguar and Colonel Melendez? She was alone, unfriended, and defenseless, in the power of a man the mere sight of whom filled her with terror. And yet, let us add, the man whom we have represented under such gloomy colors, this White Scalper, seemed to have become completely metamorphosed. The tiger had become a lamb in the presence of the maiden; he offered her the most delicate attentions, and did everything she wished—not that she ever expressed a desire, for the poor girl would not have dared to have done so, but he strove to divine what might please her, and then did it with unexampled eagerness. At times he would stand for hours before her, leaning against a wall, with his eyes fixed on her with an undefinable expression, without uttering a word. Then he would withdraw with a shake of the head, stifle a sigh, and murmur—"Good God! if it were she!" There was something touching in the timid and humble grief of this terrible man, who made all tremble around him, and yet himself trembled before a girl; although Dona Carmela, unaffected by the egotism of suffering persons, did not seem to perceive the influence she exercised over this powerful and stern nature.

The door opened and White Scalper entered. He was still dressed in the same garb, he was still as upright, but his face no longer wore that expression of haughty and implacable ferocity which we have seen on it. A cloud of sorrow was spread over his features and his deep-sunken eyes had lost that fire which had given his glance so strange and magnetic a fixity. The maiden did not turn at the sound of the Scalper's footsteps; the latter halted, and for a long time remained motionless, waiting, doubtless, till she would notice his presence. But the girl did not stir, and hence he resolved to speak.

"Dona Carmela!" he said in a voice whose roughness he tried to smooth.

She made no reply, but continued to gaze out on the plain. The Scalper sighed, and then said in a louder key:

"Dona Carmela!"

This time the maiden heard him, for a nervous tremor agitated her, and she turned quickly round.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"Oh!" he exclaimed on perceiving her face bathed in tears, "you are weeping."

The maiden blushed and passed her handkerchief over her face with a feverish gesture.

"What matter?" she muttered, and then, striving to recover herself, she asked, "What do you want with me, señor? Heavens, since I am condemned to be your slave, could you not at any rate allow me the free enjoyment of this room?"

"I thought I should cause you pleasure," he said, by announcing to you the visit of an acquaintance."

A bitter smile contracted the maiden's lips.

"Who cares for me?" she said, with a laugh.

"Pardon me, señorita, my intention was kind. Frequently, while you sit pensively as you are doing to-day, unconnected words and names have passed your lips."

"Ah! that is true," she answered; "not only is my person captive, but you will also like to enchain my thoughts."

This sentence was uttered with such an accent of concentrated anger and bitterness, that the old man started, and a livid pallor suddenly covered his face.

"It is well, señor," the girl continued, "for the future I will be on my guard."

"I believed, I repeat," he replied, with an accent of concentrated scorn, "that I should render you happy by bringing to you Colonel Melendez; but since I am mistaken, you shall not see him, señorita."

"What!" she exclaimed, bounding up like a lioness; "what did you say, señor? what name did you pronounce?"

"That of Colonel Melendez."

"Have you summoned him?"

"Yes. He is awaiting your permission to enter."

The maiden gazed at him for a moment with an indescribable expression of amazement.

"Why, you must love me!" she at length burst forth.

"She asks that question!" the old man murmured sadly. "Will you see the colonel?"

"One moment, oh, one moment; I want to know you, to understand you, and learn what I ought to think of you."

"Alas, I repeat to you, señorita, that I love you, love you to adoration; oh! do not feel alarmed; that love has nothing of an insulting nature; what I love in you is an extraordinary, supernatural likeness to a woman who died, alas! on the same day that my daughter was torn from me by the Indians. The daughter I lost, whom I shall never see again, would be your age, señorita: such is the secret of my love for you, of my repeated attempts to seize your person. Oh, let me love you, and deceive myself; in looking at you I fancy I see my poor dear child, and that error renders me so happy. Oh señorita! if you only knew what I have suffered, what I still suffer, from this miserable wound which burns my heart—oh! you would have pity on me."

While the old man spoke with an impassioned accent, his face was almost transfigured; it had assumed such an expression of tenderness and sorrow, that the maiden felt affected, and by an involuntary impulse offered him her hand.

"Poor father!" she said to him in a gentle and pitiful voice.

"Thanks for that word," he replied in a voice

choking with emotion, while his face was inundated with tears; "thanks, señorita, I feel less unhappy now."

Then, after a moment's silence, he wiped away his tears.

"Do you wish him to come in?" he asked softly.

She smiled: the old man rushed to the door and threw it wide open. The colonel entered and ran up to the maiden. White Scalper went out and closed the door after him.

"At last," the colonel exclaimed joyously, "I have found you again, dear Carmela!"

"Alas!" she said.

"Yes," he exclaimed with animation, "I understand you, but now you have nothing more to fear; I will free you from the cruel yoke that oppresses you, and tear you from your ravisher."

The maiden softly laid her hand on his arm, and shook her head with an admirable expression of melancholy.

"I am not a prisoner," he said.

"What?" he exclaimed with the utmost surprise.

"Did not this man carry you off?"

"I do not say that, my friend. I merely say that I am not a prisoner."

"I do not understand you," he remarked.

"Alas, I do not understand myself."

"Then, you think that if you wished to leave this house and follow me to the camp, this man would not attempt to prevent you?"

"I am convinced of it."

"Then we will start at once, Dona Carmela; I will manage to obtain you a respectable shelter till your father is restored to you."

"No, my friend, I shall not go, I cannot follow you."

"Why, what prevents you?"

"Did I not tell you that I do not understand myself. An hour ago I would have followed you gladly, but now I cannot."

"What has happened, then, during that period?"

"Listen, Don Juan, I will be frank with you. I love you, as you know, and shall be happy to be your wife; but if my happiness depended on my leaving this room, I would not do it."

"Pardon what I am going to say, Dona Carmela, but this is madness."

"No it is not, I cannot explain it to you, as I do not understand it myself; but I feel that if I left this place against the wishes of the man who retains me here, I shall commit a bad action."

The colonel's amazement at these strange words attained such a height that he could not find a word to reply, but he looked wildly at the maiden. The man who loves is never mistaken as to the feelings of the woman he loves. The young man felt instinctively that Carmela was directed by her heart in the resolution she had formed. At this moment the door opened, and White Scalper appeared. His appearance was a great relief to the pair, for they were frightfully embarrassed, and the young man especially understood that this unexpected arrival would be of great help to him. There was in the demeanor and manner of the old man a dignity which Carmela had never before remarked.

"Pardon me disturbing you," he said, with a kindly accent, that made his hearers start.

"Oh," he continued, pretending to be mistaken as to the impression he produced; excuse me, colonel, for speaking in this way, but I love Dona Carmela so dearly that I love all she loves; though old men are egotistic, as you are aware, I have been busy on your behalf during my absence."

"Carmela and the colonel looked their amazement. The old man smiled.

"You shall judge for yourselves," he said. "I have just heard, from a scout who has come in, that a reinforcement of Indians has turned our line, and joined the enemy, among them being a wood-ranger, called Tranquil."

"My father!" Carmela exclaimed, in delight.

"Yes," the Scalper said, suppressing a sigh.

"Oh, pardon me!" the maiden said, as she offered him her hand.

"Poor child! how could I feel angry with you? Must not your heart fly straight to your father?"

The colonel was utterly astounded.

"This is what I thought," the old man continued.

"Señor Melendez will ask General Santa Anna's authority to go under a flag of truce to the enemy. He will see Dona Carmela's father, and, after reassuring him about her safety, if he desire that his daughter should be restored to him I will take her to him myself."

"But that is impossible!" the maiden quickly exclaimed.

"Why so?"

"Are you not my father's enemy?"

"I was the enemy of the hunter, dear child, but never your father's enemy."

"Señor," the colonel said, walking a step toward the old man, "forgive me; up to the present I have misunderstood you, or rather, did not know you; you are a man of heart."

"No," he answered, "I am a father who has lost his daughter, and who consoles himself by a sweet error;" and he uttered a deep sigh, and added, "time presses; begone, colonel, so that you may return all the sooner."

"You are right," the young man said. "Farewell, Carmela, for the present."

And, without waiting for the maiden's reply, he rushed out. But when the colonel joined his men again, he learned that the order for the forward march had arrived. He was obliged to obey, and defer his visit to the general for the present.

CHAPTER XXVI. SAN JACINTO.

The news told White Scalper by the scout was true; Tranquil and his comrades, after turning the Mexican lines with that craft characteristic of the Indians, had effected their junction with the Texan army; that is to say, with the vanguard, commanded by the Jaguar. Unfortunately, they only found John Davis, who told them that the Jaguar had gone to make an important communication to General Houston.

If the American had spoken to Tranquil about his daughter, and given him news of her, he would have been forced to reveal the bargain proposed by the chief of the pirates, and he did not feel justified in divulging a secret of that importance which was not his own. The Canadian consequently remained

ignorant of what was going on, and was far from suspecting that his daughter was so near him.

At sunset the Jaguar rejoined his cuadrilla. He was delighted at the arrival of the Comanches, and warmly pressed Tranquil's hand; but as the order had been given to advance by forced marches, and the enemy was at hand, the young man had no time either to tell his old friend anything.

The general had combined his movement with great cleverness, in order to draw the enemy after him by constantly refusing to fight. The Mexicans, puffed up by their early successes, and burning with the desire to crush what they called a revolt, did not require to be excited to pursue their enemy.

The retreat and pursuit continued thus for three days, when the Texans suddenly wheeled, and advanced resolutely to meet the Mexicans. The latter, surprised by this sudden return, halted with some hesitation, and formed their line of battle.

It was the twenty-first of August, 1836, a day ever memorable in the annals of Texas. The two armies were at length face to face on the plains of San Jacinto, and were commanded in person by the chiefs of their respective republics, Generals Santa Anna and Houston. The Mexicans numbered seventeen hundred well armed, veteran soldiers; the Texans amounted to only seven hundred and eighty-three, of whom sixty-one were cavalry.

General Houston had been compelled, on the previous evening, to detach the Jaguar's cuadrilla, which the Comanches and hunters had joined; for, contrary to Sandoval's expectations, his men had refused to ratify the bargain he had made in their names with the Jaguar. Not that they were actuated by any patriotic feeling, we are bound to state, but merely because they had come across a hacienda, which seemed to offer them the prospect of splendid plunder. Hence, without caring for either party, they had shut themselves up in the hacienda, and refused to quit it, in spite of the entreaties and threats of the chiefs, who, seeing that they had made up their minds, at length followed their example. The Jaguar was therefore detached by the general to dislodge these dangerous visitors, and the young man obeyed, though unwillingly, for he foresaw that he should miss the battle.

General Houston gave Colonel Lamar, who was at a later date President of Texas, the command of the sixty horsemen left him, and resolutely prepared for action, in spite of the numerical disproportion of his forces. The two armies whose struggles would decide the fate of a country were hardly as numerous as a French regiment. At sunrise the battle commenced with extreme fury. The Texans, formed in square, advanced silently, within musket shot of the enemy.

"Boys!" General Houston suddenly shouted, as he drew his sword, "boys! REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

A terrible fire answered him, and the Texans rushed on the enemy, who were already wavering. The battle lasted eighteen minutes! at the expiration of that time, the Mexicans were broken and in full flight; their flags, their camp, with arms, baggage, provision and equipage, fell into the hands of the victors. Considering the limited number of combatants, the carnage was immense, for six hundred Mexicans, including a general and four colonels were killed; two hundred and eighty-three wounded, and seven hundred made prisoners; only sixty men, among them being Santa Anna, succeeded in effecting their escape.

As for the Texans, owing to the impetuosity of their attack, they had only two men killed and twenty-three wounded, though six of these died afterward—an insignificant loss, which proves once again the superiority of resolution over hesitation, for most of the Mexicans were killed during the rout.

The Texans slept on the field of battle. General Houston, when sending off the Jaguar against the pirates, had said to him:

"Finish with those villains speedily, and perhaps you will return in time for the battle."

These words were sufficient to give the chief of the partisans wings; still, however great his speed might be, night surprised him when still ten leagues from the hacienda, and he was compelled to halt, for both men and horses were utterly worn out. On the morning, at the moment when he was about to start again, he received news of the battle of the previous day in a very singular manner.

John Davis, while prowling among the chaparral according to his wont, discovered a man hidden in the tall grass, who was trembling all over. The American, taking him naturally enough for a Mexican spy, ordered him to get up. The man then fell on his knees, kissed his hands, and implored him to let him go, offering him all the gold and jewels he had about him. These supplications and entreaties produced no other effect on the American than converting his suspicions into certainty.

"Come, come," he said roughly to his prisoner, as he cocked a pistol, "enough of this folly; go on before me, or I will blow out your brains."

The sight of the weapon produced all the effect desired on the stranger, he bowed his head piteously, and followed his captor to the bivouac, with no further attempts to seduce him.

"Who the deuce have you brought us?" the Jaguar asked sharply.

"On my word," the American answered, "I do not know. He's a scamp I found in the tall grass, who looks to me precious like a spy."

"Ah, ah!" the Jaguar said with an ugly smile, "his business will soon be settled. Have him shot."

The prisoner started, and his face assumed an ashy hue.

"No moment, caballeros," he exclaimed, while struggling in the utmost terror with the men who had already seized him—"one moment; I am not what you suppose."

"Nonsense," the Jaguar said, with a grin; "you are a Mexican, and that is sufficient."

"I am," the prisoner exclaimed, "Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, President of the Mexican Republic."

"What?" the Jaguar exclaimed, in amazement, "you are Santa Anna?"

"Alas! yes," the President answered, piteously, for it was really he.

"What were you doing concealed in the grass?"

"I was trying to fly."

"Then you have been defeated?"

"Oh, yes! my army is destroyed. Oh, your gen-

eral is not born for common things, for he has had the glory of conquering the *Napoleon of the West*!"

At this absurd claim, especially in the mouth of such a man, his hearers, in spite of the respect due to misfortune, could not refrain from bursting into a loud and contemptuous laugh. To this manifestation the haughty Mexican was completely insensible; for, now that he was recognized, he felt sure of not being shot—he cared little for all else. The Jaguar wrote to General Houston, describing the facts, and sent off the prisoner to him, under the escort of twenty men, commanded by John Davis, to whom this honor belonged by right, as he had been the first to discover the prisoner.

"Well," the Jaguar muttered, as he looked after the escort along the winding road, "fortune does not favor me—I succeed in nothing."

"Ingrate that you are!" Loyal Heart said to him, "to complain when the most glorious trophy of the victory was reserved to you; through the capture of that prisoner, the war is over, and the independence of Texas assured forever."

"That is true," the Jaguar shouted, as he leaped with joy; "I did not think of that. Viva Dios! you are right, my friend, and I thank you for having put me on the track. By Jove! I should not have thought of that without you. Come, come," he gently exclaimed, "let us be off to the hacienda, comrades! we shall deal the last blow!"

The cuadrilla started under the guidance of its chief; we will leave the adventurers to follow their road, and preceding them for a few moments, enter the hacienda.

The pirates, according to the custom of people of that stamp, had immediately made themselves at home in the hacienda, whose owner had fled on seeing the approach of war, and from which Sandoval and his men expelled the peons and servants. The pillage was immediately organized on a great scale, and they had naturally begun with the cellars, that is to say, with the French and Spanish wines and strong liquors, so that two hours after their arrival all the villains were as full as butts, and yells and songs rose from all sides.

Naturally the White Scalper had been compelled to follow the pirates, and carry Carmela with him. In spite of the precautions taken by the old man, the maiden heard from the chambers in which she sought shelter the cries of these raging fellows which reached her, threatening and sinister as the rolling of thunder in a tempest. Sandoval had not renounced his plan of revenging himself on the man he regarded as his enemy, and the intoxication of his men seemed to him an excellent opportunity for getting rid of him.

White Scalper tried by all the means in his power to oppose this gigantic orgie, for he knew that these rough and rebellious men, very difficult to govern when sober, became utterly undisciplined so soon as intoxication got hold of them. But the pirates had already tasted the wines and spirits, and, excited by Sandoval, they only answered the Scalper's representations with murmurs and insults. The latter, despairing of making them listen to reason, and wishing to spare the maiden the odious and disgusting spectacle of an orgie, hastened to return to her, and after trying to calm her, he stationed himself before the door of the room that served as her refuge, resolved to smash the first pirate who attempted to approach her.

Several hours passed, and no one thought about disturbing the old man. He was beginning to hope that all would pass over quietly, when he suddenly heard a great noise, followed by yells and oaths, and a dozen pirates appeared at the entrance of the long corridor, at the end of which he was standing sentry, brandishing their weapons and uttering threats. At the sight of these furious men, whom intoxication rendered deaf to all remonstrances, the old man understood that a terrible and deadly struggle was about to begin between them and him. He was alone against all, but yet he did not despair; a sinister light gleamed in his eye, his eyebrows met under the might of an implacable will; he drew himself up to his full height before the door he had sworn to defend, and in an instant became once more the ferocious and terrible demon who had so long been the terror of the western countries.

The pirates, at the sight of this man who was awaiting them so menacingly, stopped involuntarily; the front men even took a timid look back, as if to see whether a chance of retreat were left them; but the passage was interrupted by those who came behind and thrust them on. Sandoval, who was well aware with what sort of a man his comrades would have to deal, had prudently abstained from showing himself, and remained with some of his friends in the banqueting-hall, drinking and singing.

The delay in the pirates' advance had suggested to the Scalper the idea of setting the door ajar, so that he might escape with greater facility when the moment arrived. But the period of hesitation did not last a second; the yells burst forth again louder than before, and the bandits prepared to rush on the old man. The latter was still calm, and cold as a marble statue; he had placed his rifle against the wall, within reach, and stood with his pistols in his hands awaiting them.

"Stop, or I fire!" he cried, in a thundering voice.

The yells were doubled, and the bandits drew nearer. Two shots were fired, and two men fell; the Scalper discharged his rifle at the mob, then, taking it by the barrel and using it like a club, he rushed on the bandits, who were startled by this sudden attack, and ere they could dream of resistance he drove them to the end of the corridor and down the stairs. Out of ten pirates six were killed, and four, dangerously wounded, fled in terror.

The Scalper lost no time; bounding like a wild beast, he rushed into the room, the door of which he closed after him, took in his arms Carmela, who was lying senseless on the floor, leaped out of the window, threw the girl across the saddle-bow, and darting on the horse's back he started across the country with headlong speed. All this took place in less time than we have required to describe it, and the pirates had not recovered from their terror ere the Scalper had disappeared.

"Viva Dios!" Sandoval shouted, striking the table with his fist; "shall we let him escape? to horse, comrades, to horse!"

*The sentence is literally true, but was said by Santa Anna to Houston himself.

"To horse!" the bandits yelled, as they rushed to the corral, where their horses were put up. Ten minutes later the pirates dashed off in pursuit of the White Scalper, and the hacienda was thus freed of its unwelcome guests.

In the meanwhile White Scalper was flying at full speed, without following any settled direction; he had only one object, thought, or desire—to save Carmela. The maiden, revived by the fresh air, was sitting up in the saddle, and, with her arms clasped round the old man's body, constantly repeated, in a voice choking with emotion, while looking with terror around her:

"Fly, fly! quicker, oh, quicker!"

And the horse redoubled its speed, and thus ran with the rapidity of the stag pursued by a pack of hounds. All at once the old man perceived a band of horsemen debouching from a hollow way just ahead of him.

"Courage, Carmela!" he shouted; "we are saved."

"Go on, go on," the maiden replied.

This band was the Jaguar's; the young chief, in his impatience to reach the hacienda, was galloping a long distance ahead of his men. All at once he perceived the horseman coming toward him.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, with a feeling of deep hatred, "White Scalper!"

He at once stopped his horse, so suddenly that his noble animal all but fell, and raised his rifle.

"Stop, stop, do not fire! in heaven's name do not fire!" the Canadian shouted, who was spurring his horse and coming up at full speed followed by Loyal Heart and the main body.

But, before the hunter could reach the Jaguar, the latter, who had not heard, or probably, had not understood him, pulled the trigger. White Scalper, struck in the middle of the chest, rolled in the sand, dragging Carmela down with him in his fall.

"Ah!" Tranquil said, in despair, addressing Loyal Heart, "the unhappy man has killed his father!"

"Silence!" the latter exclaimed, placing his hand on his mouth; "silence, in Heaven's name!"

The Scalper was not dead, however; the Jaguar approached him, probably to finish him; but Carmela, who was inspecting his wound, drew herself up like a lioness and repulsed him with horror.

"Back, assassin!" she shrieked.

In spite of himself the young man recoiled, astonished and confounded. Tranquil rushed toward the wounded man, while Loyal Heart took hold of the Jaguar, and speaking gently to him, led him from the spot where White Scalper was writhing in agony. The old man held the maiden's hand in his own, which were already bathed in a death-sweat.

"Carmela, poor Carmela," he said to her, in a broken voice; "oh, Heaven, what will become of you now that I am dying."

"No, no, it is not possible, you will not die," the girl exclaimed, stifling her sobs.

The old man smiled sadly.

"Alas, poor child!" he said, "I have but a few moments to live; who will protect you when I am gone?"

"I," said the hunter, who had come up.

"You!" the wounded man replied; "you, her father?"

"No, her friend," the hunter remarked, with a melancholy accent, and drawing from his bosom the necklace Quon'am had torn from the Scalper during the fight in Galveston Bay, he said with supreme majesty, "James Watt, embrace your daughter; Carmela, embrace your father."

"Oh!" the wounded man exclaimed, "my heart did not deceive me, then?"

"My father, my father, bless me!" the maiden murmured, falling on her knees.

White Scalper, or Major Watt, drew himself up as if he had received an electric shock, and laid his hands on the head of the kneeling girl.

"Bless you, my child!" he said; then after a moment of silence, he muttered in an almost indistinct voice, "I had a son too."

"He is dead," the hunter answered, as he looked sorrowfully at the Jaguar.

"May Heaven pardon him!" the old man muttered. And falling back, he breathed his last sigh.

"My friend," Carmela said to the hunter, "you, whom I no longer dare to call my father, what do you order me to do in the presence of this corpse?"

"Live!" the Canadian answered hoarsely, as he pointed to a horseman who was coming up at full speed, "for you love and are beloved; life is scarce beginning for you, and you may still be happy."

The rider was Colonel Melendez.

Carmela let her head fall in her hands, and burst into tears.

During my last visit to Texas, I had the honor of being presented to Dona Carmela, then married to Colonel Melendez, who retired from the service after the battle of San Jacinto.

Tranquil lived with them, but Loyal Heart returned to the desert. The Jaguar, after the events we have described, resumed his adventurous life, and a year had scarce elapsed ere his death was heard of. Surprised by Apache Indians, from whom he might easily have escaped, he insisted on fighting them, and was massacred by these pitiless enemies of the white race.

Did the Jaguar know that he had killed his father, or was it his despair at seeing his love despised by Carmela, that determined him to seek death?

That remained a mystery which no one was ever able to solve. Let us hope that a merciful and just God pardoned this son his involuntary parricide!

*See DIME LIBRARY No. 149, "Border Rifles."

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